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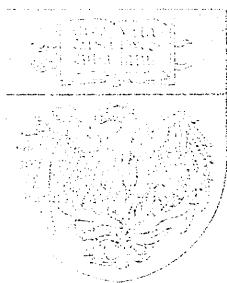
"Show Me Thy Face!"

RETREAT CONFERENCES

SILVANO MATULICH, O. F. M.



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“SHOW ME THY FACE!”

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(EXODUS 33, 13)

RETREAT CONFERENCES

By

SILVANO MATULICH, O. F. M.

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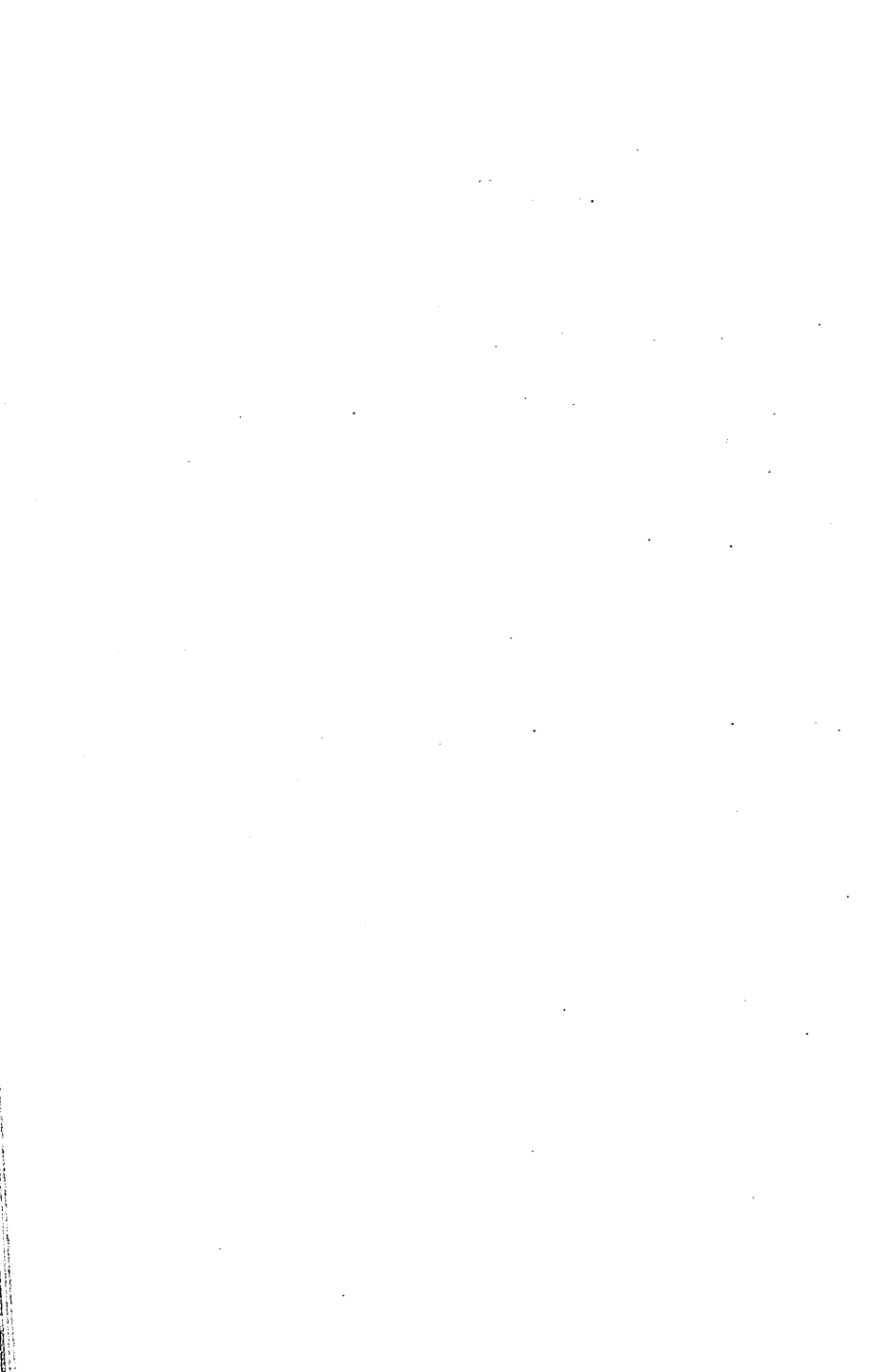
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PREFACE

These conferences were given at weekend retreats for laymen at Serra Retreat, Malibu, California. The gracious way in which they were received induced me to publish them. They have been left in the simple and direct style of their original delivery, with no attempt to recast them "in the persuasive words of wisdom." Some readers may wonder at the selection of subjects and may prefer a different choice. To such I have no reply other than, "Unusquisque in suo sensu abundet" (Rom. 14, 5).

S. M.

Old Mission, Santa Barbara
March 19, 1947

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“SHOW ME THY FACE!”

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing on high in Christ. Even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish in His sight."

(Eph. 1, 3-4)

I

THE PURPOSE OF LIFE

"... Strive even more by good works to make your calling and election sure.... Endeavor to be found by Him without spot and blameless."

(2 Pet. 1, 10. 3, 14)

LONG ago we learned in the catechism that we are in this world to know, to love and to serve God so that we may be happy with Him forever in heaven. That is the whole reason for our existence; there is no other. Therefore, we have an eternal destiny awaiting us, either of joy or of misery, and we must work out that destiny now. Life has been given us to barter with. For a penny's worth we can buy a kingdom; in a split second we can win an eternity — for life, when compared to eternity, is much less than the fleeting passage of a bird, or the momentary flash of lightning.

That is the meaning of life; that is the tremendous responsibility of life. It is not a question of a passing issue like success in some mere worldly ambition. The issue here is eternal.

We shall see God forever and love Him, or we shall never, never see Him and shall hate Him forever. These are our choices: love or hatred, joy or misery, everlasting

life or everlasting death, God or the devil, heaven or hell. Either we shall behold eternal truth and eternal beauty, or we shall be engulfed in an eternal lie and in eternal horror. One of these certainly awaits us; there is no other alternative, not even the frightful alternative of personal annihilation.

Let us consider these future states briefly. First, the joy of heaven even though no man can measure it. St. Paul puts it this way:

"Eye has not seen nor ear heard,
Nor has it entered into the heart of man,
What things God has prepared for those
who love Him."¹

But really the Apostle tells us nothing about it, because he cannot. It is beyond the range of earthly comparisons and the power of human words. Still, let us try to realize it to whatever degree we are able. Have you ever dreamed of the joy and beauty that await us? — to perceive the very life of God, to see the glory of Jesus Christ and the wounds He bore for love of us, to behold the Virgin Mother crowned with all glory as the Queen of heaven, to dwell in love forever and ever with countless angels, spirits of surpassing beauty. Would you not like to live through endless ages in the joyous company of the ancient Patriarchs and Prophets, of the Apostles and Martyrs, of every noble soul you knew and loved in life? Do you not long to rise from the grave on the last day clad in

a glorified body and transformed with spiritual beauty? Have you ever thought of the gladness of possessing a body worthy of heaven and of eternal life, and living in an immortal youth in the kingdom of God? "For this corruptible body must put on incorruption, and this mortal body must put on immortality."² Besides all this, what a satisfaction to know the mysteries of the universe and to behold in God all the interminable history of creation!

These are some feeble intimations of the glory and happiness that are stored up for us in heaven. But we shall not have any of this unless we love God and serve Him. For such a reward we must work. That is the purpose of life.

What vanity, what madness, to risk this destiny! Still, there are many who do risk it, who trade it for a trifle. They would rather have an unjust profit than all the wealth of heaven; they prefer the satisfaction of lust to the possession of immortal life; they will not forgive an enemy, and so they must give up God; they would rather endure the torture of a bad conscience than enjoy the happiness of interior peace. And thus, for a paltry nothing, "for a handful of barley and a piece of bread,"³ they expose themselves to eternal damnation, and unless they repent through the grace of God, their eternal portion will be in the everlasting pool of fire. And what company they will have there — Satan, the embodiment of hatred and malice, together with the whole multitude of the damned! And for blessing they will hear blas-

phemy, for beauty they will see horror, and everlasting despair will gnaw at their hearts because there, as in heaven, there is no end. This is God's vengeance on sin. What recklessness, what blindness to take such a risk!

Besides, it is really the most exciting and romantic experience in the world to serve Almighty God and to love Him. At every turn there is a new surprise and the beauty of some divine paradox. God is omnipotent, yet He is weak through His compassion; He knows all things, yet He is forgetful of our repented sins; He is rigid in His justice, yet mild by reason of His mercy. Then, there is His absolute aloofness, because there is none like to Him, yet on the other hand His utter friendliness, even toward sinners. He fills the universe by His omnipresence, yet He is found whole and entire under the appearances of a little wafer of bread; He has need of nothing, yet He has a terrible hunger for our love; He is surrounded by myriads of the most beautiful angels, yet He seems more interested in us; He hates sin with all the energy of divine hatred, but He loves the sinner; He is the eternal King, yet He serves us unto our salvation. What startling surprises!

It is very romantic to love God, for it is the grandest of all love stories: to love God and be loved by Him in return. There is nothing in this whole universe as limitless as the human heart, because it cannot be satisfied with anything less than the infinite. You might pour the entire universe into it, but it would not long remain con-

tented, because an urge implanted in it by God makes it strive after absolute beauty, absolute goodness; it wants to love Love itself, which is God, and it will be restless until it possesses Him.

Now, God offers us this love. Listen to His avowal: "I have loved thee with an everlasting love."⁴ Hear Him plead: "Son, give Me thy heart."⁵ Do not refuse Him. Nay, He even *commands* us to love Him — and this is the greatest of all commandments:

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God
with thy whole heart,
and with thy whole soul,
and with thy whole mind."⁶

With this commandment God clearly reserves to Himself the whole love of the entire man. The commandment is absolute; it leaves no escape, because God is infinitely worthy of love on His own account. Such, then, is our sublime privilege: to love God and love Him with full intimacy. This should be enough to stir our souls to their depths.

Let us summarize, in the words of Scripture, the two alternatives we have considered. In the Apocalypse God Himself declares:

"I am the Alpha and the Omega,
the beginning and the end.

To him who thirsts I will give
of the fountain of the water of life freely.
He who overcomes shall possess these things,
and I will be his God, and he shall be My son.
But as for the cowardly and unbelieving,
and abominable and murderers, and fornicators
and sorcerers, and idolaters and all liars,
Their portion shall be in the pool that burns
with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."⁷

It is clear that you are here for a very serious purpose, to further your sanctification and the salvation of your souls. You are here because God has given you this special grace, and you have accepted it. Now He expects you to co-operate with this gift of grace and throw your whole soul and your whole will into the work of these few days.

However, you must be set right on one important matter. The good that will be accomplished depends entirely on God. You must not think that it comes from high thoughts, or any tricks of language. That would be contrary to the great principle of the Apostle, who would not try to win men by eloquence but only by the doctrine of Christ crucified.⁸ Your faith and love depend "not on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God."⁹ Since, then, this is a work of grace, you must pray fervently for light to analyze your souls, for courage to admit your faults if they are shown to you, for strength to do what

God asks of you. But pray peacefully, without rush, without crowding yourself; pray with confidence, and ask God to fill your soul and to show you His holy will in your regard.

If you speak to God in prayer, He will speak to you by His light. A retreat is really a very intimate session between God and yourself. Let that thought absorb you. There is nothing else that should interest you during these days. You are to be concerned about the one great business, your sanctification.

Next, there should be silence. Of course it is no sin if you do not keep silence; but you will ruin your retreat if you do not keep it. What is meant by silence? First, you should not speak unless there is a good reason for doing so, such as necessity, courtesy, charity; and then your speaking should be brief and quiet. But that is only half of it. The really important thing is that you should try to observe *interior* silence by keeping all irrelevant thoughts out of your mind. An analogy will help to make this clear. Imagine yourself in one of the vast old European cathedrals. Its massive walls and ponderous doors keep out the rumor of the restless world. The sunlight filters dimly through the thick stained-glass windows, and high above you stretches the vault of the cathedral. You are there alone; no other living presence is within except Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, and He is as silent as the heavens at midnight. Here you have peace; here you have the feeling that time has ceased to be; here you are

almost face to face with God, and grace seems to wrap itself around you. Now you can pray!

Make of your soul a cathedral such as this with God and yourself in holy colloquy. Let no stranger enter there for this is a tryst between God and you alone. Therefore, do not give a thought to what is going on in the world, or to what your friends may be doing; do not let your multitudinous recollections come crowding in, as though your mind were a highway and the traffic were jammed on it. Set all that aside. It will waste your time and make your efforts fruitless. Think only of your soul now, and of God Who should be your one great love; think of your sins, and of the kingdom of heaven unto which you have been called through His mercy.

The silence, then, the keeping of your mind as quiet as a tomb, the forgetting of business, home, the newspaper, the radio, have a purpose: that you may be able to hear the voice of God in your soul. That is the great reason.

If He wills, God can speak to you in a voice that will be heard above the thunder, as He spoke to Saul on the way to Damascus. Saul, the persecutor, was hurrying to the city, "breathing threats of slaughter against the disciples of the Lord."¹⁰ Violent thoughts were in his mind. He who later testifies of himself, "The love of Christ impels us,"¹¹ was now being urged along by hatred for the very Christian name. Close to the city now, he almost had his hands on his victims; but of a sudden a

dazzling light shone around him and he was hurled to the ground, while in his ears sounded the voice of Christ. Grace smote him with telling thrusts and Saul could not parry those rapier-thrusts of grace. "Lord, what wilt Thou have me do?"¹² He was struck down a persecutor, he rose up an Apostle; he was struck down a bitter enemy, he rose up "the servant of Jesus Christ."¹³

But this is not the usual way of God. As a rule, He prefers to touch our hearts with the delicacy of a great Artist, and when He is most active in us, moving our wills toward a better life, He is so discreet and silent about it that we might easily overlook Him. Therefore, if your soul is in a clamor with its many useless thoughts, if you constantly run away from the presence of God by chasing after your many distractions, you will not notice His sacred touch, nor hear the whisper of His voice. That is why holy men and women have fled from the world and lived in the vast solitudes of the desert; that is why, even today, men and women shelter themselves in monasteries — to live in silence and hear the voice of God.

You are making this retreat in order to have full leisure to examine into the state of your soul. You are to look into your lives and see whether you have been faithful to the laws of God, the precepts of the Church, the duties of your state. The great question is: *Have I been living as I should? Is there sin on my soul — mortal sin?* Or, if you have been living in the grace of God, have

you been careless about venial sins: impatience, anger, gossip, vanity? If so, you must do something about it. You are not to continue as you have been. God wants to draw you to Himself, but you must labor earnestly to rid yourself of your harmful habits; otherwise how can you expect God to favor you with His special love?

Next, be concerned about YOUR soul, YOUR faults, and not about the faults of others. Do not be like the proud Pharisee in the Gospel story who said, "O God, I thank Thee that I am not like the rest of men."¹⁴ In another place in the Gospel our Lord says something very much to the point about those who judge others: "Why dost thou see the speck in thy brother's eye, and yet dost not consider the beam in thy own eye? And how canst thou say to thy brother, 'Brother, let me cast out the speck from thy eye,' while thou thyself dost not see the beam in thy own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam from thy own eye, and then thou wilt see clearly to cast out the speck from thy brother's eye."¹⁵ The meaning of our Lord's words is very clear and very simple: attend first to your own sins, for you are not in a position to criticize and judge your neighbor until you yourself have become holy. Now, all of us are far from holiness. And if ever we shall have reached it through the grace of God, we shall be little inclined to judge others.

And so I leave you to your own zeal and to the mercy of God. That is the combination which alone will produce good results. May He grant you a great measure

of grace during these days and form with you an undying alliance of love.*

PRAYER

O LORD, we beseech Thee, mercifully hear the prayers of Thy people who call upon Thee; and grant that they may both perceive what they ought to do, and have grace and strength to fulfill the same. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.¹⁶

CITATIONS

- ¹ 1 Cor. 2, 9.
- ² 1 Cor. 15, 53.
- ³ Ez. 13, 19.
- ⁴ Jer. 31, 3.
- ⁵ Prov. 23, 26.
- ⁶ Matt. 22, 37.
- ⁷ Apoc. 21, 6-8.
- ⁸ 1 Cor. 1, 17.
- ⁹ 1 Cor. 2, 5.
- ¹⁰ Acts 9, 1.

- ¹¹ 2 Cor. 5, 14.
- ¹² Acts 9, 6.
- ¹³ Rom. 1, 1.
- ¹⁴ Luke 18, 11.
- ¹⁵ Luke 6, 41-42.
- ¹⁶ Collect for the Sunday within the Octave of Epiphany. (All collects are quoted after the *St. Andrew Daily Missal*, Bruges, Belgium.)

*Note: As a slogan for your retreat I would suggest the ejaculatory prayer, "Sacred Heart of Jesus, Thy kingdom come." Pray it often in your heart, and put your heart into the prayer. Pray it on your rosary, leisurely, peacefully. Ask Jesus with unquestioning confidence that He be pleased to rule as King over your mind and heart. Let the fragrance of this beautiful prayer permeate your entire retreat.

II

JUDGMENT

"All of us must be made manifest before the tribunal of Christ, so that each one may receive what he has won through the body, according to his works, whether good or evil." (2 Cor. 5, 10)

WE ARE making this retreat for a very serious purpose: to be renewed in courage that we may struggle bravely and perseveringly for eternal life. In this struggle, our enemies will combine their forces and try to bring about our ruin by waging what we may call a psychological warfare against us. They will try to lure us to one of two extremes: discouragement or presumption.

Discouragement will tempt us to think that the effort is too great, and that we cannot succeed even if we make it; and the memory of our past sins will come to fill us with dread. This is a very grave and perilous temptation. If we yield to it, we are in great danger of giving up altogether and of living our life like one who has already been condemned to death with no chance of appeal. We must determinedly overcome this tendency with the constant thought of the mercy of God, and with a complete surrender of ourselves to His goodness.

Or, we may be tempted to presumption, and then we are in danger of taking dreadful chances, saying to ourselves the while: "God is good. He knows I am weak; He even died for me. And besides, He forgives sin so easily! Why be so scrupulous about it? Somehow I shall manage to be sorry for my sins in time before the end, and thus I shall escape hell and get to heaven, even though I shall not expect a very high place in heaven. But what of that, if I only get there?" And so we will live carelessly from day to day, with no effort at pleasing God and no real sorrow for sin, and all the while the sword of God is unsheathed and may strike us at any moment.

This particular temptation we shall overcome by seriously considering that one day we shall have to stand before the tribunal of Christ for an examination of our whole life. And what an examination that will be! Remember when you went to school — how you dreaded the examinations then, and how troubled you were as to whether you would pass or fail? But you were only being examined on the contents of a few books; and it may have been, too, that you were a little sly and cheated a bit with no one being the wiser. But the book on which Christ will examine you will be the history of your life: all of it, your thoughts, words, desires; all that you did and all that you neglected; not only the general outline but every hidden detail. He will confront you with that story and there will be no chance for a plea, no room for an explanation. You will have no one to coach

you, and there will be no refutation of His charges. It is all settled the moment you arrive before the judgment seat. You should have taken counsel during life; you should have been careful to write a different book. It is to this awful book that the Church refers in the Mass for the Dead when she says:

"Now the book is open spread;
Now the writing must be read
To judge the living and the dead.

"When the Judge assumes His throne,
All that's hidden He'll make known;
Then His justice will be shown.

"How may I, poor wretch, endure,
Or of any aid be sure,
When the just feel not secure?"¹

We know this, yet we are not solicitous. Day after day we write a chapter, but we write with monotonous repetition; there is no improvement. Remember, we shall face an infallible Judge. He can make no mistakes. We shall face Him Who is infinite wisdom; Who has had His all-holy eye upon us every moment of our life, scrutinizing all our purposes, all our schemes; Him to Whom the deepest recesses of our heart, no matter how secret, are as clear as day. We might deceive others; we cannot deceive God. So absolute is His knowledge of us, so

unerring His judgment, that in the twinkling of an eye He passes a perfectly just and irrevocable sentence, one that has eternal consequences.

Next, we shall have a Judge Who is no respecter of persons. Before Him we are all nothing but dust. If we are saved, it is a gift of His bounty; we have no natural claim to heaven. Talent, accomplishments, knowledge, nothing will mitigate His judgment; as Holy Scripture says, He "will render to every man according to his works."² The judgment goes by what we have done. Did we live as we should have lived? — that is the only question that will be considered. Did we fight a good fight against sin? — on that depends our eternal crown. St. Paul says, "one . . . is not crowned unless he has competed according to the rules";³ and the rules of this supreme contest are the laws of God and of the Church and the duties of our state in life. Imagine, if you can, what we shall have to answer for! All our negligence, all our thoughtlessness, all our sins, both mortal and venial. All our lack of love, all our want of real sorrow for sin. Yet it cannot be evaded. Now God is merciful; then He will be just.

Nor can we escape the execution of the sentence. If the judgment is inevitable, so is the punishment, whether it shall be temporal in purgatory or eternal in hell. We cannot escape one little measure of it. It must be a satisfaction to the last penny, for God is now vindicating His own divine majesty. We cannot escape because God is everywhere. Thus we read in the Psalm:

"If I should mount to heaven, Thou art there:
And if I should make the nether-world my
couch, behold Thee there."⁴

And what if it should be a sentence of eternal punishment? God forbid! Yet, see with what intense and trembling words the Church prays for the faithful departed: "Deliver me, O Lord, from eternal death on that dreadful day when the heavens and the earth shall be moved, and Thou shalt come to judge the world by fire. I am seized with fear and trembling when I reflect upon the judgment and wrath to come. That day, a day of wrath, of wasting and of misery, a dreadful and exceeding bitter day."⁵ We must face that dreadful day; we must see to it that we live through it.

Cardinal Newman has written an impressive passage in which he attempts to describe the damnation of a soul who once had grace, but lost it:

"Oh, what a moment for the poor soul, when it comes to itself, and finds itself suddenly before the judgment-seat of Christ! Oh, what a moment, when, breathless with the journey, and dizzy with the brightness, and overwhelmed with the strangeness of what is happening to him, and unable to realize where he is, the sinner hears the voice of the accusing spirit, bringing up all the sins of his past life, which he has forgotten, or which he has explained away. . . . And, oh! still more terrible, still more distracting, when the Judge speaks, and consigns . . . [the soul] to the jailers, till it shall pay the endless

debt which lies against it! 'Impossible, I a lost soul! I, separated from hope and from peace forever! It is not I of whom the Judge so spake! There is a mistake somewhere. . . . What? hopeless pain! for me! Impossible, it shall not be.' And the poor soul struggles and wrestles in the grasp of the mighty demon which has hold of it, and whose very touch is torment. 'Oh, atrocious!' it shrieks in agony, and in anger too, as if the very keenness of the affliction were a proof of its injustice. 'A second! and a third! I can bear no more! Stop, horrible fiend, give over; I am a man, and not such as thou! I am not food for thee, or sport for thee! I never was in hell as thou, I have not on me the smell of fire, nor the taint of the charnel-house! I know what human feelings are; I have been taught religion; I have had a conscience; I have a cultivated mind; I am well versed in science and art. . . . Nay — I am a Catholic; . . . I have attended the Sacraments for years; I have been a Catholic from a child. . . .' Alas! poor soul; and whilst it thus fights with that destiny which it has brought upon itself, and with those companions whom it has chosen, the man's name perhaps is solemnly chanted forth, and his memory decently cherished among his friends on earth. His readiness in speech, his fertility in thought, his sagacity, or his wisdom, are not forgotten. Men talk of him from time to time; they appeal to his authority; they quote his words; perhaps they even raise a monument to his name, or write his history. . . . Oh, vanity! vanity of vanities, all is vanity! What profiteth it? His soul is in hell."⁶

These are the words in which the great Cardinal describes the dreadful scene. Is it not shocking? Is it not appalling? Is it not a dreadful thought that the awful possibility is open also to us? — Oh, "it were better for that man if he had not been born."

Such is one possibility, the tragic case of eternal damnation. The other possibility is the exact opposite. Imagine, if you can, the indescribable bliss of passing from this weary world into the kingdom of eternal light, peace and joy. Imagine yourself on your deathbed (at least, there is a fair chance that you will die in bed). Perhaps you have lingered with a wasting and tormenting disease. At first, everyone cheers you with the hope of recovery. But with the passing weeks their attitude changes. You observe it yourself, and you realize that the case is serious. Finally, the day comes when the doctor himself must admit it: you might die at any time; he cannot hold out the smallest hope for you; your time has come. But, as you were peaceful in life because you loved God and served Him, so are you peaceful in death. You can smile at it. Your fight is ending. You know that a crown is in store for you. And when your senses weaken, and the end draws nearer, nearer, you almost see the gates of eternity open wide before you, and for the first time that full, steady splendor of everlasting day breaks upon you. You are coming to the realization of your hopes. Your day of joy is dawning. You have suffered long to make sure of this imperishable home in heaven. This is the kingdom where all the former things are forgotten

forever, and where all your tears shall be wiped away. Your heart is light. It is void of all worldly interests and of sin, but full of grace and merit, and the streams of God's delights flood you with ineffable joy. Now you realize that your hope was well placed. You built on the word of God which stands forever. Your life was not spent in vain. Here is your triumph. With irresistible gladness you burst out in the words of the Psalmist: "I was glad when they told me, 'We shall go unto Jehovah's house.'"⁸

You listen with untroubled peace as the priest commends you in your dying moments to God: "Depart, O Christian soul, out of this sinful world in the name of God, the Father Almighty. . . . I commend thee, dear brother, to Almighty God, and commit thee to His mercy, Whose creature thou art; that having paid the common debt of nature by giving up thy soul, thou mayest return to thy Maker, Who formed thee out of the earth. . . . Receive Thy servant, O Lord, in the place of salvation, which he hopes to attain through Thy mercy. . . . Into Thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit. . . . O Lord Jesus Christ, receive my spirit. . . . Holy Mary, pray for me."

You are at the end. Behold, the Bridegroom, Jesus, cometh! And because you loved Him, He loves you; because you have trusted in Him, He will have mercy on you; because you suffered for His sake, He will give you joy; because you bravely fought against sin, He will crown you with victory. He comes to you, and in His hands is His reward: eternal life in the bosom of God:

"Well done, good and faithful servant; . . . enter into the joy of thy Master."⁹ With one last gasp you relax — you are dead! The priest now takes up a new prayer and offers it, not for you, but as an admonition for your relatives and friends who are in tears around your bed: "Grant, O Lord, that while we here lament the departure of Thy servant, we may ever remember that we are most certainly to follow him. Give us grace to prepare for that last hour by a good life, that we may not be surprised by a sudden death, but may be ever watching when Thou shalt call; that so with the Spouse, we may enter into eternal glory. Through Christ our Lord."

However little we like to think of it, death is not very far off for any of us. Therefore, let us make up our minds that we will accomplish our salvation at every cost. Let us take no chances. The trial comes but once, and is settled for good and all. Pray against that terrible day. Pray for each other, that God in His mercy may grant us all the supreme grace of a happy death; that He may give us the mercy of fulfilling His will now in all things, and of closing our life in the embrace of His eternal love.

Whatever happens to us between now and then, however hard it be, is nothing by comparison. We may have sickness and suffering; we may have disappointment; we may have a dreary life; we may be harrassed perpetually by temptations; we may be weak and succumb from time to time. But if we endure everything well to the end, and try earnestly to endure it patiently, whatever the

occasional failure (so only we be sincere and repent and strike out again bravely and generously), we may confidently hope that God will be pleased with us and in His own time will call us to Himself.

And when that time comes, may we have the surpassing grace to shout out triumphantly the words of St. Paul: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith. For the rest, there is laid up for me a crown of justice, which the Lord, the just Judge, will give to me in that day."¹⁰

PRAYER

ALMIGHTY and merciful God, Who bestowest on mankind both the remedies of health and the gifts of life everlasting: look mercifully upon us Thy servants, and refresh the souls which Thou hast made; that at the hour of their going hence they may be found worthy to be presented without stain of sin to Thee, their Maker, by the hands of the holy angels. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.¹¹

CITATIONS

¹ *Dies Irae*, quoted after *My Requiem Missal* (Father Stedman).

² Rom. 2, 6.

³ 2 Tim. 2, 5.

⁴ Ps. 139 (138), 8. (The customary usage of including the Psalm numbers of both Hebrew and Vulgate, is followed throughout.) The Psalms are quoted after *The Psalter in the Westminster Version* (Lattey, Sands and Company, London).

⁵ From the *Libera*.

⁶ *Discourses to Mixed Congregations*, pp. 38-40 (Longmans, Green and Company, New York).

⁷ Mark 14, 21.

⁸ Ps. 122 (121), 1.

⁹ Matt. 25, 23.

¹⁰ 2 Tim. 4, 7-8.

¹¹ Collect of the Mass for a Happy Death.

III

PRAYER

"I wish, then, that the men pray everywhere, lifting up pure hands." (1 Tim. 2, 8)

ONE of the most important things we must do in order to co-operate with God toward our sanctification and salvation is to pray; to pray fervently, confidently, perseveringly. We are taught this very explicitly in the New Testament both by parable and example. It is a mystery that Christians should sometimes find it difficult to approach God with their desires in absolute confidence, for He is "the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort."¹

In his Epistle to the Ephesians, St. Paul makes one of the grandest and most boundless petitions to God for his converts: "I bend my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . , that He may grant you from His glorious riches to be strengthened with power through His Spirit unto the progress of the inner man; and to have Christ dwelling through faith in your hearts: so that, being rooted and grounded in love, you may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know Christ's love which surpasses knowledge, in order that you may be

filled unto all the fullness of God.”² What an astonishing prayer! He asks for power and strength according to divine abundance; he asks for that which is impossible, namely, that we be able to understand the charity of Christ, which he distinctly says surpasses understanding; he asks that we be filled with the fullness that comes from God. Yet, immediately after this bold petition, the Apostle continues, “Now, to Him Who is able to accomplish all things in a measure far beyond what we ask or conceive, in keeping with the power that is at work in us — to Him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus down through all the ages of time without end.”³

This is how far we can go in our petitions. The reason is, that we are appealing to the God of infinite riches and infinite goodness, Who does not even hesitate to give us His very self. His goodness and generosity, like everything in Him, are infinite, and therefore, when He gives, He is not satisfied till He has given Himself. What, then, will He withhold from us? Why, the Church chants in praise of His goodness, “That Thou mightest redeem the slave, Thou didst deliver Thy Son”!⁴ First, therefore, do not be timid in your requests; you will not overtax either His wealth or His generosity. But an essential condition for success in prayer is confidence. With confidence, you can plunder Him. He is invulnerable to all attack except the attack made upon Him with confidence.

God is like a fortress whose foundations are built into the depths of eternity, whose battle-towers are om-

nipotence, whose sentries are omniscience. He is, therefore, insuperable; impervious to any assault. Thus we read in the Psalm in which the sacred writer describes the rising of the nations in rebellion against Him:

"Why do the nations throng together,
And the peoples devise a vain thing,
While the kings of the earth stand together,
And the rulers assemble,
Against Jehovah and against His Anointed?"⁵

Here we have the noise of marching feet, and the rumble of chariots, and the murmur of the multitude laying their plans of attack and assembling their strength. And what is the reaction of God as He looks down from heaven? The Psalmist continues,

"He that sitteth in heaven doth laugh;
My Lord doth mock at them."⁶

Yet confidence makes of this impregnable fortress an open city. Let us take an instance of this.⁷ In the second year of His public ministry, our Lord retired with His Apostles into the district of Tyre and Sidon. This was the first time He had set foot on pagan territory since His flight into Egypt as an Infant. He did not go to exercise His apostolate, for the hour of the pagan world had not yet come; rather, He wished to flee from the conspiracies of His enemies in Judea. But though

He came incognito, He could not remain hidden, and possibly the very first petitioner to approach Him was the Canaanite woman. "Have pity on me, O Lord, Son of David!" she begged. "My daughter is sorely beset by a devil." But Jesus paid no attention to her; "He answered her not a word." Think of it, not a word from Him Who is the Word of God! What a distressing and discouraging thing!

But the poor woman was not going to be put off. She really wanted her prayer answered. Therefore she called and called after Him — so urgently that the Apostles apparently were annoyed and would have been glad to be rid of her. Accordingly, they interceded for her, "Send her away, for she is crying after us." In other words, "give her the miracle so that she will hold her peace." But Jesus gives the Apostles an answer which seems to imply a categorical refusal: "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." The sense of our Lord's words is: "This woman is not an Israelite; she is a pagan, and therefore beyond the scope of My personal mission; she will not have her miracle." What could seem more hopeless? "But," the Gospel continues, "she came and worshiped Him, saying, 'Lord help me!'" Her reward was another refusal, and not without some touch of severity: "It is not fair to take the children's bread and to cast it to the dogs." This allegory of our Lord is not meant to be offensive. He merely points out, in a very graphic way, the order willed by God in the dispensation of New Testament grace:

first the Jews (the children), then the pagans. Nevertheless, the reply is equivalent, of course, to another refusal: "You are a pagan, your hour has not yet come, you will not have your miracle."

But in this answer, Jesus leaves Himself open to a new attack. The woman sees it, shrewdly takes up His allegory and retorts with spirit, "Yes, Lord; for even the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." In other words: "Yes, indeed, set the table and lay the many dishes before the children; bless them with Your saving ministrations and favor them with Your many miracles — but remember that the dogs are under the table and are allowed to eat whatever falls to the floor; I am asking only for that. One miracle to a pagan will be like a crumb as compared to the thousands You are conferring upon the Jews; there can be no complaint against one, only one." And then our Lord, Who loves nothing so much as to have His omnipotence conquered by so frail a thing as confidence, replies: "O woman, great is thy faith! Let it be done to thee as thou wilt." And the Gospel tells us that "her daughter was healed from that moment."

See this persistent woman. In spite of the cold silence of Jesus, in spite of His refusal, which seemed so absolute, when the Apostles interceded for her, she hoped against hope, and was not deceived. She wrested her miracle from Christ — I had almost said, in spite of Himself — by confidence.

Do not the Scriptures tell us to be insistent in prayer, to harass God with our petitions, to leave Him no rest? "I say to you," our Lord summarizes the parable of the importunate friend knocking on the door at midnight, "because of his persistence he will get up and give him all he needs."⁸ Then, we have the parable of the godless judge who at first would not rectify the injustice done to a poor widow. But she left him no peace, and finally, in sheer weariness he said, "Because this widow bothers me, I will do her justice, lest by her continual coming she finally wear me out." And Jesus Himself makes the application: "Hear what the unjust judge says; and will not God avenge His elect, who cry to Him day and night?"⁹ Therefore, pray to God perseveringly and thank Him in advance for hearing you; "for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him."¹⁰

Again, referring to the time after His Ascension into heaven, Christ gives us this double assurance: "In that day you shall ask in My name; and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father for you, for the Father Himself loves you because you have loved Me."¹¹ Therefore, say with St. John, "we have come to know, and have believed, the love that God has in our behalf."¹² If we believe in that divine love, we must trust it, because we trust every deep and sincere love.

So then, what is it that you want? — Pray for it! Pray for it with the confidence and the perseverance of the Canaanite woman. And when God seems to be holding you off, as in the case of this good woman, do not

give up; have confidence; you will win out. And do not let any feeling of unworthiness rob you of confidence, because if God cannot listen to you as a friend, He will listen to you as a humble beggar.

But pray chiefly for the grace of becoming holy and for the salvation of your soul. When you ask for these things, you are unquestioningly praying according to the will of God; for "this is the will of God, your sanctification,"¹³ and God our Savior "wishes all men to be saved."¹⁴ Pray with sincerity and perseverance, and God will hear you. I do not say that He will make the process of self-sanctification easy, but He will give you success if only you co-operate with His grace. It is often the function of grace to give you fortitude in the pursuit of virtue even while it permits you to feel the strain of combat and the sense of personal weakness and the groaning of nature. So it was with the great Apostle — so great that he had been "caught up to the third heaven." He was subject to some harassing trial and prayed to Christ for release — and it was not given to him. Here are the Apostle's own words: "Concerning this I thrice besought the Lord that it might leave me. And He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for thee, for strength is made perfect in weakness.'" In other words, he was given the answer, "No, Paul, you shall keep your cross, but I will give you the grace to sustain it." And the magnanimous Apostle continues, "Gladly therefore, I will glory in my infirmities, that the strength of Christ may dwell in me."¹⁵

Pray to receive the grace of prayer, for prayer is the life of the soul. If through this retreat you become prayerful men, the retreat will have been abundantly blessed by God. A very simple but a very effective way of leading a prayerful life is the use of ejaculatory prayers. They need not be said with the lips. Say them in your heart, quietly, peacefully, earnestly, and put love into them. Do not take a half-dozen different ones. Take one, but one that means something very special to you. Choose it as fitting your own spiritual need or your spiritual ambition. Thus, there may be someone profoundly discouraged because of his many faults; he feels it is almost impossible to improve. Let him take this prayer, "Sacred Heart of Jesus, I trust in Thee." But *trust* in Him! Another is irascible; everything provokes him; he is ready for trouble on the slightest pretext. Let him take the prayer, "Jesus meek and humble of heart, make my heart like unto Thine." But he must really *wish* to become meek and humble; he must make serious efforts when the occasion arises. Another is too concerned about his temporal needs; he is too ambitious about getting ahead; it is an obsession with him and often he finds it difficult to choose between God and the world. Let him take the prayer, "My God and my All." But he must try to make God his highest concern. Another is tempted frightfully against holy purity. Let him pray, "Sweet Heart of Mary, be my salvation." And then trust her, and take the precautions necessary to guard purity.

Let your prayer mean everything to you. Have it on your lips the first thing in the morning. Pray it on your way to work or to the office. Let every red and green traffic light remind you of your prayer. Meet all your associates, your friends, your clients with your lovely prayer in your heart. It will become like fragrant incense in your heart rising the whole day long to the God Who loves you; and He in turn will bless you all the day. When you meet your friends you are glad, you greet them, you exchange a few words. But God is your most intimate Friend. He is everywhere; every lovely sight and sound should remind you of Him for everything is His gift, and if you are free from mortal sin, He is in your heart, living the fullness of His eternal life there in your very bosom. Greet Him often, and each time it will have all the gladness of a new meeting with Him Who made you and Who longs for your love.

Besides, your prayer will be a constant petition for that special grace you need, and it will always remind you of the new ideal you mean to realize. It will remind you that you really intend to trust in God, or that you intend to become patient, or that you intend to remain pure. And so the whole day long your prayer will be like a song of love in your heart to the God of love Who is enthroned there in all His glory.

Adopt this practice and be faithful to it. On the other hand, do not overdo it; do not make it a strain. Be peaceful, for God is peaceful. Do not rush your little prayer; linger over it; let it bubble up from your heart

like a spring; roll it over your tongue, and the charm of this delightful conversation with God will grow on you, and it will tug at your heart, and you will experience the help of God, and you will undoubtedly improve. Thus your prayer will become a part of your very life, and you will learn to love it and to depend upon it — so much so that you will begin to feel that you could not get along without it.

In the Bible we read, "Is any one of you sad? Let him pray. Is any one in good spirits? Let him sing a hymn."¹⁶ You will have your prayer, you will have your hymn, for every circumstance; it will be your chosen ejaculation. St. Paul writes, "Be filled with the Spirit, . . . singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things."¹⁷ Your thanks will be your ejaculatory prayer.

Thus you will grow intimate with God; you will greet Him at every turn, on every street corner; you will find Him at every traffic signal; you will behold Him in the face of friend and foe — for we must love even those who hate us because such is the will of God. And what is more, all that you do will be done better and more expressly for His greater glory, and thus throughout life you will be sowing the seeds of eternal merit which you will harvest in the fields of heaven. . . . Try it!

First, then, we must have confidence in the goodness of God; next, we must trust in His fatherliness. No matter what our petition may be, no matter how urgently we desire that it be heard, leave all in the hands of God.

If He delays, He does so for a good purpose. Thus, in the Apocalypse we read this prayer made by the martyrs in heaven: "How long, O Lord (holy and true), dost Thou refrain from judging and from avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" Such was their prayer. It was a petition prompted, not by the wish for revenge, but by love of justice and desire for the triumph of Christ. But it was not answered immediately. "And they were told to rest a little while longer, until the number of their fellow-servants and their brethren who are to be slain, even as they had been, should be complete."¹⁸ God delayed in order that the ranks of the martyrs might first be filled. His delay in your case may serve toward the completion of your own little martyrdom. He may be giving you an occasion to do penance for your past sins. He may be leading you to greater detachment from creature comforts. At all events, He is enticing you deeper into His arms. Therefore, weary not. Lift up your voice and let your petitions be made known to God; and then, with St. Paul, let the matter rest: "I know Whom I have believed."¹⁹

PRAYER

LET Thy merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of Thy suppliant people; and that Thou mayest grant them their petitions, make them to ask such things as shall please Thee.²⁰

CITATIONS

- | | | | |
|----|----------------------------|----|--|
| 1 | 2 Cor. 1, 3. | 12 | 1 John 4, 16. |
| 2 | Eph. 3, 14-19. | 13 | 1 Thess. 4, 3. |
| 3 | Ibid., vv. 20-21. | 14 | 1 Tim. 2, 4. |
| 4 | From the <i>Exsultet</i> . | 15 | 2 Cor. 12, 8-9. |
| 5 | Ps. 2, 1-2. | 16 | James 5, 13. |
| 6 | Ibid., v. 4. | 17 | Eph. 5, 18-20. |
| 7 | Matt. 15, 21-28. | 18 | Apoc. 6, 10-11. |
| 8 | Cf. Luke 11, 5-10. | 19 | 2 Tim. 1, 12. |
| 9 | Cf. Luke 18, 1-8. | 20 | Collect for the Ninth Sunday
after Pentecost. |
| 10 | Matt. 6, 8. | | |
| 11 | John 16, 26-27. | | |

IV

CONFESSION AND CONTRITION

"The sorrow that is according to God produces repentance that surely tends to salvation."

(2 Cor. 7, 10)

THE day on which Christ rose from the dead, He appeared to His Apostles and said to them, "'As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.' When He had said this, He breathed upon them, and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit; whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained.'"¹ With these merciful words He bestowed on His Apostles and His priests the power to forgive all and every sin no matter of what number or kind.

One of the works you should perform before the retreat is over is to make a good confession. It is to be presumed that none of you will find that difficult; though, on the other hand, it is possible that one or the other has a conscience that is burdened. Should this be the case, then for such a person, a good confession is THE work of the retreat. If you do nothing more than make a thorough confession, you will have accomplished a wonderful thing.

No one should be dismayed at the thought of making his confession. Confession is a merciful arrangement. You tell your sins to the divine Judge through the ears of His human minister, who himself has a deep realization of human misery, and who fully appreciates the fact that, if he is different from you, it is due to the grace of God. Hence he will be understanding; he will also be sympathetic, because you are his brother. It is true that confession is a judgment-seat; but God, Who is the Plaintiff, charges His judge, the priest, to do everything in his power that the defendant, the sinner, may be absolved of guilt and be reinstated in heavenly grace and love. Therefore, you do not approach the confessional as you would a civil tribunal. You would go to a civil tribunal coached by an attorney and plead "not guilty" though your hands might be red with blood; but you come to the confessional with supreme confidence and humbly and frankly say, "Bless me, father, for I have sinned." What a strange thing, what a divine paradox — "Bless me *because* I have sinned!" Such is your self-accusation, such is your hope of acquittal. It is as though you said, "I have sinned; but bless me with the mercy of God and say to me, 'Take courage, son; thy sins are forgiven thee.'"² Note, moreover, that you do not call the confessor "judge" but you address him by the comforting title of "father."

Therefore, should there be any one of you who is fearful about confession because his conscience is weighed down with sin, let me reassure him. If he is truly sorry,

then, in a sense, he is a lucky man. The priest will treat you better than he would a saint. He will show you special kindness; he will work on the wounds of your soul with all the tenderness of a mother, and with all the mercy of Christ, because the priest is the authoritative representative of the love of Christ.

Christ has come in search of you, and because of His immense solicitude for you, you become attractive to the heart of the priest, who, like his divine Master, will leave the ninety-nine just and go in search of you that he may bring you back to the fold rejoicing.³ We always wish a blessing upon you, and mercy, because we know that desolation is in your soul and that you are without the gladness of God. You fill the thoughts of the saints because they have compassion on you; you draw to yourself all the solicitude of the entire Church that you may be converted and be restored to grace: for "if one member suffers anything, all the members suffer with it."⁴ Be comforted also with a grand hope: great sinners have become great saints. And once you make peace with God, you are not denied the sublime ambition of striving after the most intimate union with Him.

Certainly you have all been examining your consciences and you probably have found that they have a sharp sting. You have not only been reflecting over what has been said so far, but you have been experiencing the impulses of grace. Have I been making my sanctification and salvation the real business of my life? Or have I rather imperiled my soul? Perhaps you must admit that

from a spiritual point of view your life has been very superficial; that time has hurried along with few of your thoughts and very little of your love given to God. Perhaps you have even been living in sin, risking your very soul for a mere nothing. What a reckless man you have been! Your sins have been accumulating through the months and years; all that time you have been defying God.

Truly, we should have contrition; profound, humble, confident sorrow, for we neglected divine love so much; we have so often failed God. For instruction and inspiration, let us go over the great prayer of contrition, the *Miserere*, which David, the royal Psalmist, composed after the prophet Nathan charged him with his secret sins.⁵

The penitent king was overwhelmed with the greatness of his offense; pierced through with a sense of guilt and smitten with profound sorrow. And so the first words that rush from his lips, full of confidence and full of urgency, beg for pardon:

“Be gracious to me, O God, according to Thy kindness:
And according to the greatness of Thy compassion
blot out my transgressions.”⁶

King David has nothing to warrant pardon but his own misery and the goodness of God. He sees nothing in himself that might be a ground for forgiveness; rather, he depends exclusively on the mercy of Him Whom he

has offended. He throws himself into the arms of divine clemency, and with all the spirit that is in him cries, "Blot out my transgressions." He dreads the thought of his sins, abhors the memory of them — "blot them out!" An ancient Jew would have put it that way. He is thinking of the record that is written against him. Such records were usually written on papyrus, a very fragile material, and cancellations were made by washing off the writing. A Babylonian, whose records were made on clay tablets, might have said: "Break my sins to pieces, crush them, pulverize them, that the memory of them may be destroyed forever."

David not only longs to have his record washed, but he also wants his own person thoroughly cleansed.

"Wash me utterly from mine iniquity,
And cleanse me from my sins."

He asks not only to be sprinkled with cleansing water, but to be vigorously scrubbed, like a garment, so that every vestige of his sins may be removed and he be made white as snow.

Next, he makes humble confession of his sins. He does not try to hide them or palliate them; for then God would laugh him to scorn, whereas He gives His grace to the humble and contrite.

"For myself I do know my transgression,
And my sin is always before me."

This sorrow is sincere; it is not a passing emotion, a mere surface repentance, but one that gives him genuine pain, for his sins haunt him: "my sin is always before me." This is the sorrow of one who finally realizes the goodness and majesty of Him Whom he has offended, the God of his fathers, the God of the Covenant, Who was gracious and kind, not only to the Jewish nation, but in a special way to David himself. It is such crushing grief that for the moment he forgets the injustice which he perpetrated against men by his sins; it is the thought of God alone which now fills his mind:

"Against Thee, Thee alone, have I sinned,
And have done what is evil in Thine eyes."

The sorrow of the king is so sincere that he will defend the glory of God by a public confession of his crimes. The Jews were wont to interpret suffering as a direct punishment for sin. Now, David had been chosen by God Himself as king over His own people; his sins had been committed in secret, and there was danger that seeing him subjected to punishment, his people might say, "David has done no evil; is God, then, unjust?" To forestall this criticism of God, David openly acknowledges his sins. This would seem to be the meaning of the words:

"That Thou mayest be justified in giving sentence,
And approved in pronouncing judgment."

He has confessed his own personal sinfulness. Now he makes a further plea for pardon by humbly declaring what is common to all of us, a strong propensity to sin:

"Behold I was brought forth in iniquity,
And in sin did my mother conceive me."

I am infected with the stain of original sin. I have in me, from birth, the depravity of concupiscence, and all the dreadful urge to sin. As St. Paul put it, "I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind and making me prisoner to the law of sin,"⁷ and thus "the flesh lusts against the spirit."⁸ These words remind us of a passage from Francis Thompson:

"These corporal leavings, Thou not cast'st us new,
Fresh from Thy craftship, like the lilies' coats,
But foist'st us off
With hasty tarnished piecings negligent,
Snippets and waste
From old ancestral wearings,
That have seen sorrier usage."⁹

Thus we have that tragic being, man, the crown and king of this visible creation, so often making himself the willing slave of the animal that is in him and immeshing himself in nameless turpitude. One can well continue with the words of Thompson, who makes the reflection that it would appear as though man had been born merely

"To sweat, and make his brag, and rot,
Crowned with all honor and all shamefulness."¹⁰

After humble confession of his sins and of his sinfulness, David begs not only for forgiveness, but for the restoration of spiritual beauty and happiness:

"Purify me with hyssop, that I may be clean:
Wash me, that I may be whiter than snow.
Make me to hear joy and gladness,
That the bones which Thou hast crushed may rejoice."

The king is deeply conscious of his sinfulness and of his natural weakness. He knows that the root of evil is in his own heart. He must have struggled and often found himself unequal to the struggle, and so he realizes that he cannot be loyal if he remains such as he is. Therefore, he makes a magnificent, an astonishing petition to God:

"Create me a clean heart, O God!"

This is one of those bold, tempestuous prayers that are inspired by intense desire. David could not have used a stronger word, because he is looking for a miracle of transformation; he begs that he be lifted up, by the divine mercy and divine power, above himself so that his heart may be a new handiwork of the Creator. His ardent prayer almost anticipates the glory of the New

Testament grace: "If then any man is in Christ, he is a new creature";¹¹ "For His workmanship we are, created in Christ Jesus in good works."¹²

Sorrow for sin implies a purpose of amendment, for where there is no mind to leave off sinning there is no true contrition. We have already seen the deep sorrow of David. His purpose of amendment was equally sincere. But since nothing will be accomplished except through the grace of God, he now begs for perseverance:

"And renew a steadfast spirit within me";

a spirit that will be loyal and will not fail again in the obedience it owes to You. Let me serve You henceforth in the gladness of peace with You:

"Restore to me the joy of Thy salvation
And let a willing spirit support me."

The penitent king would gladly offer ritual sacrifice in atonement for his sins if he could; but he cannot, for none of the various sacrifices prescribed by the Law of Moses was intended as atonement for serious personal sins. Rather, the Law of Moses provided the sanction of death for the sins of which David has been guilty: adultery and murder. Still, the king is not at a loss: pardon is conditioned not on sacrifice but on contrition. David realizes that the most precious of all gifts which a peni-

tent sinner can offer is such contrition, and offering it, he extols the wonderful, compassionate love of God:

"The sacrifices for God are a broken spirit:

A broken and contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt
not despise."

Such is the sacrifice most acceptable to God, a spirit penetrated by contrition; a spirit repentant, humble, confident. And thus, at the end of his prayer, God has the penitent just as He wishes to have him, "a broken and contrite heart." Here, then, we have a model of contrition and purpose of amendment: petition for forgiveness, humble confession of sin, a prayer to be received again into the grace of God, and a prayer for the gift of perseverance.

We must also bear in mind, when considering the sin of David, that he was not only disobedient to God, but very ungrateful as well. The Lord had been extremely good to him, as the prophet Nathan reminded him: "Thus saith the Lord of hosts: I took thee out of the pastures from following the sheep to be ruler over My people Israel. And I have been with thee wheresoever thou hast walked, and have slain all thy enemies from before thy face: and I have made thee a great name, like unto the name of the great ones that are on the earth."¹³ Yet David took no account of all these favors when he sinned.

Still, we are in no position to criticize the king. We have been far more ungrateful than he, because the blessings God has conferred on us outstrip immeasurably those He conferred on David. If God took David out of the pastures and made a king of a shepherd boy, He took us out of the shame and misery of sin; He "Who is rich in mercy, by reason of His very great love wherewith He has loved us even when we were dead by reason of our sins, brought us to life together with Christ."¹⁴ If He made David a king, He opened unto us a heavenly kingdom, for He "transferred us into the kingdom of His beloved Son."¹⁵ If He was with David whithersoever he walked, He has also stood at our side with His protection and His grace; and from our mothers' womb He brought us to the waters of regeneration. If He gave David a great name, He has given us a far greater: no less than the name of adopted sons of God; for we "have received a spirit of adoption as sons, by virtue of which we cry, 'Abba! Father!'"¹⁶ "For you are all the children of God through faith in Christ Jesus."¹⁷ This adoption is no mere fiction as in the case of human adoptions: "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; *and such we are.*"¹⁸ Therefore, God accomplishes something in us when He adopts us; we are no longer what we used to be, because if "any man is in Christ, he is a new creature: the former things have passed away; behold, they are made new!"¹⁹ In what does this consist? We "become partakers of the divine nature"²⁰

— not that we become gods, but we become godlike: we are “called children of God; *and such we are.*” What should follow on our part? St. Paul points out the obligation which flows from this adoption when he says, “Be you, therefore, imitators of God, as very dear children and walk in love.”²¹ If a child is adopted into a human family, he is properly expected to conform himself to the traditions of that family; and if we are adopted into the household of God, we are rightly obliged to conform ourselves to its tradition, which is the tradition of love. “As very dear children,” we are to “walk in love.”

Such are the favors which God has bestowed upon us. And in return, we have not been true to Him, we have offended Him, we have shown no adequate measure of gratitude. We have not pursued virtue as we should have; we have not labored at self-sanctification with that zeal which God has a right to expect. Truly, we have become degenerate children, and there is every reason for humility and contrition.

However, when imploring forgiveness, we must, like David, be confident. No matter what the number or the heinousness of our sins, they can never be too great for the mercy of God if only we are contrite and confident. Does not God daily manifest His eagerness for our repentance and His willingness to forgive, by His endless patience with this sinful world?²² “The mercies of the Lord, that we are not consumed.”²³ Who could sound the depth of that fetid sea of iniquity which covers the earth even to the mountaintops? Yet He Who is all-

merciful would dissipate it all by glad forgiveness in the twinkling of an eye, if there were true repentance on the part of the sinful world. If any one of us were the last man on earth and had on his conscience, as his own personal guilt, all the sins of humanity, and if he were to come to God just before the crack of doom with true contrition and unquestioning confidence, even to him God would say unhesitatingly, "Take courage, son; thy sins are forgiven thee."²⁴ Shall we put limits to the infinite? Is not God more jealous of His mercy than of His omnipotence, He Who manifests His almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity?²⁵ Jesus is still Jesus, "able at all times to save those who come to God through Him, since He lives always to make intercession for them."²⁶ Therefore, trust in mercy if ever you are tempted to despair, or are harassed with tormenting scruples. "Amen I say to thee, this day thou shalt be with Me in paradise."²⁷

PRAYER

*GRANT unto Thy faithful people pardon and peace, we beseech Thee, merciful Lord, that they may both be cleansed from all their sins and serve Thee with a quiet mind.*²⁸

CITATIONS

- 1 John 20, 21-23.
- 2 Matt. 9, 2.
- 3 Luke 15, 3-7.
- 4 1 Cor. 12, 26.
- 5 2 Kgs. 12, 7-12.
- 6 Ps. 51 (50).
- 7 Rom. 7, 23.
- 8 Gal. 5, 17.
- 9 *An Anthem of Earth* (Random House, New York).
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 2 Cor. 5, 17.
- 12 Eph. 2, 10.
- 13 2 Kgs. 7, 8-9.
- 14 Eph. 2, 4-5.
- 15 Col. 1, 13.
- 16 Rom. 8, 15.
- 17 Gal. 3, 26.
- 18 1 John 3, 1.
- 19 2 Cor. 5, 17.
- 20 2 Pet. 1, 4.
- 21 Eph. 5, 1-2.
- 22 Rom. 2, 4.
- 23 Lam. 3, 22.
- 24 Matt. 9, 2.
- 25 Collect for the Tenth Sunday after Pentecost.
- 26 Hebr. 7, 25.
- 27 Luke 23, 43.
- 28 Collect for the Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost.

V

MERCY

"I desire mercy."

(Matt. 9, 13)

IT WILL be very fruitful to meditate on the mercy of God, because a fuller realization of that surpassing mercy will certainly increase our trust in God and our love for Him. The words which our Lord gave to Sister Benigna Consolata Ferrero will be our guide, for to her He dictated a "Decalogue of Mercy."¹

The first point is this: "I am the God of all mercy." This compassionate mercy is mentioned on almost every page of Sacred Scripture, and according to the context it means: compassion, love, pardon, tenderness. It fills the whole earth:

"The earth is full of His kindness."²

It reaches to the very heavens:

"Jehovah, Thy kindness reacheth unto the heavens,
Thy faithfulness unto the clouds. . . .

Man and beast Thou savest:

Jehovah, how precious is Thy kindness!

The children of men come unto Thee:

They take refuge in the shadow of Thy wings."³

St. Paul assures us that God is "rich in mercy";⁴ and elsewhere the Apostle calls him "the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort."⁵

The second point is: "I seek nothing so much as to exercise mercy continually." Here, let us take the story of Mary Magdalene; you know it well. St. Luke gives it in the following way: "Behold, a woman in the town who was a sinner, upon learning that He was at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment; and standing behind Him at His feet, she began to bathe His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head, and kissed His feet, and anointed them with ointment."⁶ There is the story of love and contrition; but the story of mercy will be more lovely still. Mary certainly had met the Son of God before. On some occasion she must have heard Him speak — that speech which held the multitude spellbound — ⁷ and listened enthralled to the words of grace which flowed from His lips. She saw the sanctity in His face, and the kindness in His eyes, and the mildness in His gestures, "fairer than the children of men."⁸ And His eyes fell on her, and somehow, even as with St. Peter,⁹ they pierced her soul with sorrow, a sweet, tormenting sorrow that would soon urge her with a bewitching restlessness to the throne of mercy. Finally, the chastening anguish prevailed, and she set out to find Him, for she was in search of His mercy and was confident she would receive it. Hearing that He was at dinner in the Pharisee's house, she took the jar of precious ointment and hastened

to the banquet. Here she beheld divine Mercy reclining at the table among sinners — another proof of His ineffable compassion — and, distracted with grief and love, rushed to His feet. Tears streamed from her eyes, and in their torrent she washed His feet. Thus she poured forth her heart before the Throne of Mercy.

But think of the exquisite gesture, never dreamed of before, that with her long tresses she should have dried those sacred feet after she had bathed them with her tears. It is impossible to describe the depth and delicacy of such love. It struck profoundly the imagination of St. John, the beloved disciple, who used it later to characterize Magdalene and to distinguish her from all other women born of Eve: "Now it was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet dry with her hair."¹⁰

What must have been her thoughts in the midst of this industry of love! "Alas, I might have loved Him always, but I have learned to love Him so late! I have loved vanity for His truth and sin for His sanctity and tyranny for His mercy." And she kissed His feet continuously.¹¹ Quickly she broke the alabaster jar, and having poured the ointment upon His feet, worked it reverently into His sacred flesh. What condescension on the part of Jesus, Who, though Purity itself, did not disdain to receive these loving ministrations from a penitent sinner.

All the while, Simon the Pharisee, the host of Jesus, looked upon this moving scene and was troubled and

thought within himself, "This Man, were He a prophet, would surely know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner." Certainly He knew who Mary was, and He also knew the secret thoughts of Simon; and to prove it, He proposed to him a parable: "'A certain moneylender had two debtors; the one owed five hundred denarii, the other fifty. As they had no means of paying, he forgave them both. Which of them, therefore, will love him more?' Simon answered and said, 'He, I suppose, to whom he forgave more.' And He said to him, 'Thou hast judged rightly.'"¹² Then turning from Simon to Mary He said, "Dost thou see this woman?" — and all eyes were upon her — "I say to thee, her sins, many as they are, shall be forgiven her, because she has loved much." Indeed, she loved far more than Simon did. Jesus was his guest, yet Simon violated every canon of courtesy toward Him; whereas Mary, in her immense love, made richest reparation to Jesus for the slights of Simon, although utterly unaware of them. Jesus Himself points out this glaring contrast: "I came into thy house; thou gavest Me no water for My feet; but she has bathed My feet with tears, and has wiped them with her hair. Thou gavest Me no kiss; but she, from the moment she entered, has not ceased to kiss My feet. Thou didst not anoint My head with oil; but she has anointed My feet with ointment."¹³ Then turning to Mary, He spoke words of divine reassurance: "Thy sins are forgiven." And who was she? St. Luke tells us, "a woman in the town who was a sinner." But

Christ says to her, "Go in peace." Why? Because she has loved much. Such is divine mercy.

We come to the third point of the "Decalogue of Mercy": "To exercise justice is for Me to go against the current; it does violence to Me." This we can well imagine. The Son of God, when He became man, stripped Himself of His external glory through mercy, and died for us. He was crushed like a grape under the feet of His enemies, yet He died with His heart full of love and compassion for them. A single mortal sin provokes His justice; yet see how His mercy endures! How many there are living forty, fifty, sixty years, adding sin upon sin, and living on the mercy of God alone! The hope that they may still become the happy captives of that mercy withholds the arm of His justice; and thus "mercy triumphs over judgment."¹⁴

The fourth point: "The door of My mercy is never closed; it is always ajar; however lightly touched, it opens; even a little child can open it, or an old man who has lost his strength." Imagine, then, how little is required to win the mercy of Christ: a spirit of contrition, humility and confidence, and we shall have it. The door stands ajar; you can almost stumble through it into His mercy, as the good thief stumbled through it and fell into paradise, and as countless others have stumbled through it and are now in glory in heaven.

The fifth point: "The door of My justice, on the contrary, is shut and locked; and I open it only to him who compels Me to do so; but I never open it spontaneously."

What shall we say to that? And remember, He is constantly offended by all, either in greater or in lesser degree; yet He opens the door of His justice only under constraint. Will not that win us over finally and entirely to His love? Is not that enough to arouse in us at least a generous will toward Him? Can we still go on negligently and without principle, or must there be applied to us, in their own measure, the severe words of St. Paul to the unbelieving Jews: "Dost thou despise the riches of His goodness and patience and long-suffering? Dost thou not know that the goodness of God is meant to lead thee to repentance?"¹⁵

The sixth point: "Once the soul has crossed the threshold of the door of My mercy, she falls into the power of love, who employs every means possible to hinder her from escaping, and to attract her to her new abiding-place." Surely, the experience of the mercy of God will beget in us a deep love for God — especially if we have been great sinners. See the tears it wrung from the very heart of Mary Magdalene, and the unbounded love. And though Christ said to her, "Go in peace," she never left Him, but followed in His footsteps. It is she whom we find on Mount Calvary; not St. Peter, but the two great exponents of love, the one innocent, the other penitent, St. John and Mary Magdalene. And we would expect to see her there once more embracing those sacred feet, now pierced with nails, and bathing them with a fresh flood of tears. Mary had first experienced the immense charity of Christ in the banquet hall; here, at the foot of the

cross, she is witnessing the sublimest expression of His divine goodness — she sees the price He paid for her forgiveness. Referring to his crucifixion Christ said, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to Myself";¹⁶ imagine with what omnipotent bonds He drew Mary to Himself that day on Golgotha. With Christ she was nailed to the cross;¹⁷ and she who had been a sinner in the town was made worthy to wear a crown of eternal glory.

The seventh point: "Once she has become the happy prisoner of love, love sets her at liberty, but only within the precincts of love; because if the soul should issue forth from this enclosure, she would meet death. Love does not prevent her departure but averts it, and this is the bridle that he puts upon her." Nobody welcomes a forced devotion, a forced love, neither God nor man. God wants to be loved from a full and free heart; and therefore, in spite of all His longing for our love, if we nonetheless spurn Him, He will spurn us; if we depart from His embrace, He will suffer us to depart, but we shall find death.

The eighth point: "The more evil the state to which the soul is reduced by the sins of the past, by her disorders and passions, so much the more pleased is love to have so much to accomplish in her." Evidently, then, there is no reason for discouragement when we really turn toward love. The more wretched we are, in fact, the more we have a claim on mercy, for an infinite mercy seeks an infinite misery that it may forgive and heal.

Mary Magdalene was a sinner in the town, but who ever enjoyed such delicate intimacy with Christ as she? Who was ever allowed to bathe the feet of the Incarnate Word with tears and dry them with her hair and kiss them and anoint them with ointment? And who had the first vision of the risen Lord? Who but Mary — first Mary the Immaculate, then Mary the penitent. The privilege was not granted to the Apostles, but to Mary, whom Christ on that morning constituted an apostle to His Apostles: "Go to My brethren and say to them, 'I ascend to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God.' Mary Magdalene came, and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord, and these things He said to me.'"¹⁸

Are you conscious of having been ungrateful? of having been negligent? of having been sinful? If you are truly sorry, if you are earnestly determined to turn toward Him for the future, do not let the memory bear you down; your misery will only urge Christ to exercise a greater measure of solicitude in your behalf. "Souls the most miserable, the most weak, the most infirm are the best clients of love, the most desired of the divine mercy" (ninth point).

The tenth point: "These souls, thus become as it were the favorites of God, will, like so many living monuments, exalt and magnify the multitude of His mercies, sending up to God the reflections of living light, His own light, which they have received from Him during their mortal life — the multitude of kindnesses God has made use of to conduct them to eternal salvation. These souls

will shine like precious gems, and will form the crown of the divine mercy." This is the end of the story, the end of the divine romance. Here, indeed, we can use the words of the Psalmist:

"He raiseth the weak from the dust,
And lifteth up the poor from the dunghill."¹⁹

Misery has been turned into glory, dust has become a jewel, the slave of the devil has become the eternal crown of God. What a transformation! What mercy on the part of God! And all of this "unto the praise of the glory of His grace."²⁰ Thus, upon our profound miseries God raises up the throne of His divine mercies.

Consider the following beautiful instance. It is the case of Nicola of Toldo, a Perugian knight who was condemned to death on the charge of high treason. He was a bantering spirit; he was ignorant of the catechism; he had not made his first Communion. Now he was condemned to death. As he raged against God and man, everything seemed to foretell that he would die the death of the impious. But he called for St. Catherine of Siena. She hastened to him; she encouraged him; she exhorted him to virtue. After an ardent prayer she obtained for him the grace of making his first — and last — Communion. She induced him to submit to his death as an atonement for his past life. Now was the time to trust in divine mercy.

When the hour came, St. Catherine accompanied him to the very scaffold, stood beside him, received his severed head in her own hands. Then, in ecstasy, she beheld an indescribable scene. Jesus was on the scaffold, at once as Judge and Rewarder. He stooped, gathered up the blood, which was still warm, and placed it like a precious jewel in the wound of His own Sacred Heart. Then St. Catherine saw the soul of Nicola wing its way, radiant and transfigured, into the realm of peace.²¹

Do you now understand what is the measure of divine mercy, the measure of divine love? Do you not see that it is measureless? Therefore, do not be discouraged, for mercy seeks out misery and transforms it into glory and sets it like a jewel in its own beautiful crown.

"I will sing forever the kindnesses of Jehovah."²²

PRAYER

HOOK down upon us, O God, our protector, that we who are oppressed by the weight of our sins, having experienced Thy mercy, may serve Thee with a tranquil mind.²³

O God, Who dost manifest Thy almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity: increase Thy mercy toward us, that, seeking the way of Thy promises, we may be made partakers of Thy heavenly treasures. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.²⁴

CITATIONS

- ¹ *Vademecum Proposed to Religious Souls*, by a pious author (Daleiden, Chicago), pp. 76-78. Sister Benigna Consolata Ferrero is here quoted as on mere human authority, and not in a manner contrary to the decree of Urban VIII.
- ² Ps. 33 (32), 5.
- ³ Ps. 36 (35), 6-8.
- ⁴ Eph. 2, 4.
- ⁵ 2 Cor. 1, 3.
- ⁶ Luke 7, 37-38.
- ⁷ Luke 4, 22.
- ⁸ Ps. 45 (44), 3.
- ⁹ Luke 22, 61.
- ¹⁰ John 11, 2.
- ¹¹ Cf. Luke 7, 45.
- ¹² In this parable, the one who owed five hundred denarii represents the sinful woman, while the one who owed fifty represents Simon; both were debtors to God because of their sins.
- ¹³ Luke 7, 44-46.
- ¹⁴ James 2, 13.
- ¹⁵ Rom. 2, 4.
- ¹⁶ John 12, 32.
- ¹⁷ Cf. Gal. 2, 20.
- ¹⁸ John 20, 17-18.
- ¹⁹ Ps. 113 (112), 7.
- ²⁰ Eph. 1, 6.
- ²¹ Cf. *Resurget frater tuus*, anon. (Trento, 1932), p. 134, n. 3.
- ²² Ps. 89 (88), 2.
- ²³ Collect for Ember Saturday in Lent.
- ²⁴ Collect for the Tenth Sunday after Pentecost.

VI

"I HAVE A GOD WHO IS ALL MINE"¹

"In this is the love, not that we have loved God, but that He has first loved us." (1 John 4, 10)

THIS is something wholly true and supremely ravishing: God is all mine! Eternal Beauty, everlasting Life, Omnipotence, infinite Mercy, infinite Love: all this is God, and this God is all mine. With the bride in the Cantic of Canticles we can exclaim, "Such is my Beloved, and He is my Friend."² He is so much mine that you would think there was no other creature in the whole universe that might interest my God. He gives His whole thought, His whole attention, to me; and from eternity to eternity the thought of me is before Him. As long as God has known Himself He has known me, and from the very first He thought of me as associated with His only-begotten Son, the Beloved. And from eternity He cherished the gracious design of taking me up into His fatherly bosom. How true are the words of St. Paul, how astonishing the revelation he makes to us of the eternal plan of the Father: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing on high in Christ. Even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we

should be holy and without blemish in His sight in love. He predestined us to be adopted through Jesus Christ as His sons, according to the purpose of His will, unto the praise of the glory of His grace, with which He has favored us in His beloved Son."³

Love is expressed by gifts. God kept the secret of the gift He would make to me locked up in His bosom from eternity: the secret of my existence, and the sublime gift of Himself, His divine Son and His Holy Spirit. All this He gave me "in love."

This magnificent God, Who is all mine, is also my Father. He is my Father, because from the beginning He loved me with the love of a father; because He has adopted me as His son; because He has sent into my heart the Spirit of His Son, Who fills my heart and brings to my lips that tumultuous exclamation of love and trust, "Abba, Father."⁴ A child is at peace in the presence of its father; it is full of confidence; it has the keen sense of reassurance and safety, for the arms that encircle it are the arms of its father. Shall I not yield myself to the same sense of security in the presence and under the protection of my heavenly Father?

My heavenly Father exercises a divine solicitude toward me. It is He Who established the myriads of stars and assigned to each its proper place in the vast expanses of heaven; He gave the sun its station; He appointed the phases of the moon; He gives drink to the beasts of the field; He planted the trees of Lebanon, and there the birds build their nests; and for the deer He

constructed a refuge in the mountain crags; He clothes the grass with beauty; the lily stands upon the field, but

"His fingers pushed it through the sod."

When He looked upon His own handiwork with human eyes, He was charmed by its beauty: "I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed like one of these."⁶ He sends down rain from the heavens; He fashions the snowflakes into exquisite patterns. The sparrow falls to the earth in death, and the Father's eye follows its fall and takes note of it.⁷ Am I not of much more value than all these things? For all other things, God is a Creator; for me, He is a Father. "Seek first the kingdom of God and His justice, and all these things shall be given you besides."⁸

This God Who is all mine desires that I be all His — forever! Is it possible that He Who is His own eternal and infinite blessedness should be eager for my love, that He should strive to win my love? Is it conceivable that He is so jealous of my love that if I stubbornly refuse it to Him, then, in a fury of wounded love, He will slay me with eternal death, and hate me forever with all the terrible energy of an omnipotent love which has been repudiated? Yes, He will do that.

With the fullness of His divine independence He has willed to love me freely, and He looks to me for a full and free return of love; and woe to me if I refuse it. Woe to me if I love anything but Him, anything that im-

plies sin, for He is jealous of me with a jealousy that is divine. Will not the very vengeance which He threatens be proof to you that He is all yours and that He ardently desires that you be all His? If He were not truly earnest, He would scorn you when you neglect Him, as the Psalmist says,

"He that sitteth in the heavens doth laugh;
My Lord doth mock at them."⁹

But He does not laugh in scorn when you jilt Him; rather, He raises up His omnipotent arm and hurls you away from Him in infinite fury, out of His sight, beyond the margins of the world, into the depths of hell. Love is His very nature, and therefore, when you wound His love and set it at naught, you wound God to the quick, and His love turns into wrath, and His solicitude into destruction, and His jealousy into hatred, and He will trample you underfoot, He of Whom the prophet says,

"The everlasting mountains cleave asunder,
The eternal hills sink down
(Beneath the steps of the Eternal . . .)."¹⁰

You will say these are appalling thoughts. Yes, they are. But I have dwelt upon them merely to prove the statement with which we began, "I have a God Who is all mine. This God Who is all mine wishes, in full earnestness, that I be all His forever." And I have taken

this subject because I wish to lead you to complete confidence in God. Certainly, in view of what has been said, you will be assured that you can trust your Father with an absolute trust. Will you not put your entire life into His keeping? Will you not follow the admonition of St. Peter: "Cast all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you"?¹¹ The flower of true love is confidence; confidence even when you know you have failed the Beloved, even when you have sinned against Him.

Now, let us go on to another thought. This God of love has even descended from heaven in search of our love, and stood before us, and with human lips and all the tender accents of a divine-human yearning pleaded His own cause. God sent His own Son, the spotless image of His eternal beauty, among us, and made Him like to us in all things, except sin, that He might win our hearts by every possible allurements.

Have you ever thought of the immense hazard the Son of God took in coming as He did? Have you ever tried to realize that He actually set aside His external, divine glory for thirty-three long years? What king would give up his robes and all the attending pomp of his state, in behalf of a slave? Yet God stripped Himself and came in beggary, in beggary for our love. Does the Man of Sorrows look like the God of glory? Does it look like glory when He lies prostrate in a sweat of blood, amid the shadows in the garden, supplicating his Father "with a loud cry and tears"?¹² When He stands in fetters like a captured robber? when He is gashed and

torn by the scourging? when the coarse soldiers mock His Kingship? when His face is marked by the heavy blows and stained with blood and soiled with spittle? — does all that look like divine glory? Nay, does it even look like human beauty?

"But I am a worm and no man:

The taunt of mankind, and the despised of
the people."¹³

When God appeared to the prophet Isaias He came in overwhelming majesty, surrounded by glorious seraphim shouting out in heavenly acclaim, "Holy, Holy, Holy, the Lord God of hosts, all the earth is full of His glory."¹⁴ And the earth trembled at those resounding voices, and the prophet exclaimed in dismay and dread, "Woe is me."¹⁵ When He appeared to the prophet Ezechiel, He came on a marvelous chariot-throne borne on the outstretched wings of the cherubim.¹⁶ But when He appeared to us, He came in lowliness and helplessness like every infant. He had hardly set His foot upon His own world when Herod sought to murder Him, and He was forced to flee like a refugee into Egypt. He built the heavens, he set the earth upon the sea, yet living here He plied a humble carpenter's trade, and never once drew on His miraculous power to help himself over the weariness. He led a humble life; He died in humiliation, "to the Jews indeed a stumbling-block and to the Gentiles foolishness."¹⁷ And to add pathos to the tragedy, He

was put to death with the very instruments of His trade: wood, hammer, nails.

Such is the hazard He took. He risked all that in the hope of winning our love. I call it a hazard, because it was an enormous risk to make such a protestation of love and make it so publicly — hanging on a cross between heaven and earth — yet with the awful chance of being repudiated for all His pains. And He was repudiated; repudiated shamefully by His own generation, who had heard His voice, and seen His beauty, and profited by His many miracles, when, in a fury wrought in them by mob psychology before the judgment-seat of Pilate they cried out, "Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas! . . . Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"¹⁸

He took the risk and failed with His own people, and with a multitude of men. In mere human relations, the rejection of an ardent plea of love has often ended in madness, suicide, murder. But God was still not discouraged; He did not lessen His eagerness. He still pleads His case strongly with friend and foe by a thousand artifices of love: by sorrow and joy, by encouragement and remorse. He turns our sweetness into bitterness and bitterness into sweetness, He strips us of all that would usurp His place in our heart, He coaxes and chastises, from the first dawn of reason down to our dying breath — all in the hope of conquering at last, even if it be only at the very last, each tardy, loveless heart.

This is not the end of it. God made Himself our Brother, and because we are clothed in mortal, suffering

flesh, He willed to be clothed in it too. He would make no exception in His own favor.¹⁹ And after being made like to us, it was His design to make us like to Himself by granting us the sublime privilege of sharing in His Sonship and His divinity, as far as that is possible.

He wishes to be our friend. "You are My friends," He says in the Gospel.²⁰ Jesus, Who sits on the right hand of the Majesty on high, desires to be our friend: a friend in the strict sense of the word, "a friend of publicans and sinners."²¹ And He gives us the proofs of friendship. One such proof is the communication of intimate secrets. Christ has given this proof; He gave us His deepest secrets, those He had learned in the bosom of His Father: "I have called you friends, because all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you."²² He gave us the proof of blood, a proof which is beyond all question: "Greater love than this no one has, that one lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends. . . ."²³

He wants to be our comfort: "Come to Me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest."²⁴ He wants to be our physician and heal the wounds of our souls with a touch of His gentle hand and the anointing of His grace. He wants to be a medicine for us, and purify our blood with a transfusion of His own blood, and fortify our weak flesh by feeding it on His own virginal flesh. God, in a word, becomes our servant, as He Himself says in the Gospel: "The Son of Man has not come to be served but to serve."²⁵ You would almost

think we had become His very God. Such is the beauty and goodness of God. Who would not long to see Him? — "Hide not Thy face from me. Let me see Thy face even if I die, lest I die with longing to see it."²⁶

Such is the friendliness and the love of God toward us. In all these exquisite ways He pleads for your love. You know that He is tugging at your heart even now. You know He wants you to surrender to Him. You also realize that you will enjoy a wonderful interior peace if you do give in to Him. Do not be afraid of His call; do not throw up your guard and try to ward Him off. Cease your resistance; capitulate to Him. He will not subject you to a "death march"; He will take you by the hand and march with you shoulder to shoulder — on a steep and narrow way, it is true, and through the shadows; but you will be ascending higher and higher till at last you reach the summit, and there you will see the face of God.

"Would that today ye would hearken to His voice!"²⁷

Yield to Him an undivided heart, and glorify Him with unquestioning confidence. By confidence, of course, I do not mean presumption, which is an entirely different thing and a very dangerous thing; I mean that trustful approach to God our Father, and to Jesus our Brother, like a child's in approaching his earthly father, a brother's in approaching his brother.

PRAYER

O GOD, Who hast prepared for those that love Thee such good things as eye hath not seen: pour into our hearts such love toward Thee that, loving Thee above all things, we may obtain Thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.²⁸

CITATIONS

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|---|--|
| 1 <i>Vademecum</i> , etc., pp. 75-76. | 16 Ez. 1. |
| 2 Cant. 5, 16. | 17 1 Cor. 1, 23. |
| 3 Eph. 1, 3-6. | 18 Luke 23, 18. 21. |
| 4 Gal. 4, 6. | 19 Hebr. 2, 10. 14. |
| 5 Francis Thompson, <i>Field-Flower</i> | 20 John 15, 14. |
| 6 Matt. 6, 29. | 21 Matt. 11, 19. |
| 7 Cf. Matt. 10, 29. | 22 John 15, 15. |
| 8 Matt. 6, 33. | 23 <i>Ibid.</i> , vv. 13-14. |
| 9 Ps. 2, 4. | 24 Matt. 11, 28. |
| 10 Hab. 3, 6. | 25 Matt. 20, 28. |
| 11 1 Pet. 5, 7. | 26 St. Augustine, <i>Confessions</i> , I, 5. |
| 12 Hebr. 5, 7. | 27 Ps. 95 (94), 7. |
| 13 Ps. 22 (21), 7. | 28 Collect for the Fifth Sunday after Pentecost. |
| 14 Isa. 6, 3. | |
| 15 <i>Ibid.</i> , v. 5. | |

VII

THE GREAT PROMISE

*"Who will not make a return of love to One
Who has loved so much?"* (St. Bonaventure)

THE grandest revelation of the love of God for us is manifested in the gift He made us of His own beloved Son. Christ was given to us so completely that He actually became one of us. As He belongs in the bosom of His Father eternally by reason of His divine nature, so, by reason of His human nature, He belongs in the bosom of humanity. Before the Incarnation, we might have complained petulantly to God, "How can I love Thee with my whole heart and my whole soul and all my strength, if I have never seen Thy face?" Since the Incarnation, that is impossible. And since the Incarnation, if we ever had questioned the greatness of His love for us, He could have offered authentic proof, documentary evidence written in virginal flesh and guaranteed with the seal of divinity: His own Incarnate Son. The matter is beyond dispute. Without relinquishing His divinity, the Son of God became man; and what is more, He came that He might die for us. St. Paul expresses it this way: "Who though He was by nature God, did not consider being equal to God a thing to be clung to, but

emptied Himself, taking the nature of a slave and being made like unto men. And appearing in the form of man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to death, even to death on a cross."¹

We were a fallen race — excluded from heaven and the vision of the God of beauty, and weighed down with the sentence of damnation. And from the very first, down through all the centuries, we proceeded to heap upon ourselves an unspeakable burden of guilt in the eyes of God. Yet He looked upon us and took pity. He was merciful because we were wretched. He showed us a divine measure of love though we were utterly unworthy of it. And because we were helpless to redeem ourselves, He sent His only-begotten Son to redeem us. St. Paul puts it all in this magnificent statement: "We . . . were by nature children of wrath. . . . But God, Who is rich in mercy, by reason of His very great love wherewith He has loved us even when we were dead by reason of our sins, brought us to life together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and seated us together in heaven in Christ Jesus, that He might show in the ages to come the overflowing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."² Indeed, "in this has the love of God been shown in our case, that God has sent His only-begotten Son into the world that we may live through Him."³ And how did God accomplish all this mercy? Through the blood of the cross of Christ, His only-begotten Son.⁴ No wonder St. John exclaims, "God so loved the world!"⁵

What of Jesus Himself? What of His lovable Person, His unbounded charity, His incomprehensible mercy, His eagerness to forgive every offense and every treachery, His solicitude for sinners, the grandeur of His love for us, His immense longing for our love in return, His heroic self-sacrifice on the cross, His divine gift of Himself to us in the Eucharist? Yet, after loving us so much, He is loved so little in return! You know what it means to love much, to be kind, to be generous, and still not to be loved, to receive no gratitude, to be treated slightly or with contempt. Such things have broken human hearts. But Christ loves the whole world with a boundless love, and almost the whole world neglects Him; there is but a small measure of gratitude. That is His disappointment, His loneliness, His desolation. He is in the midst of us and He is not welcome; He stretches out His arms and we flee away; He pleads, "Son, give Me thy heart," and we say, "No." No wonder St. Paul exclaims in holy wrath, "If any man does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema."⁶

One of the fruits of your retreat ought to be a deepened devotion to the Sacred Heart. We should remember that this is essentially a devotion of reparation. We must try to make it up to Him. Because He is loved so little, we must be eager to love Him so much the more, with our whole soul, our whole mind, our whole heart and our whole strength. Our Lord said to St. Margaret Mary, "If men would return Me love for love, I should think but little of all that I have suffered for them, and should

wish, if possible, to suffer still more." And then He appeals to the saint, "Do thou at least console Me, by supplying for their ingratitude as far as thou art able." Such is the plea He makes to all of us, "Do thou at least, console Me . . . as far as thou art able." This is His desire, His will, His command, and in the Gospel He says, "If you love Me, keep My commandments."⁷

What is meant by the expression "Sacred Heart"? We mean the Person of Christ, but viewed under a special aspect. Because of the richness and grandeur of Christ's being, we can consider Him under many titles. Thus, we can think of Him as the King of all creation, and represent Him in statue or picture as a crowned Ruler. Or we can consider Him as the eternal Highpriest, and represent Him in that semblance. But if we think of Him as the God-man, loving us with a sublime and boundless love, yet as being loved so little in return, we represent Him as the Sacred Heart. A devotion that is to be nurtured must have a symbol which will keep its memory vividly in our minds. Our Lord provided such a symbol. In one of His apparitions to St. Margaret Mary, He showed her His heart. Flames of love were bursting forth from it, a crown of thorns circled it round and round, and a cross surmounted it; and holding forth that fiery symbol, He said, "Behold the heart which has loved men so much that it has spared nothing even to exhausting and consuming itself to prove to them its love, and in return I receive from the greater number nothing but ingratitude." This blazing heart is the sym-

bol of that immense love which is not loved in return. The reason for representing it in pictures and statues is to remind us of Love which is not loved, and to inspire us to generous reparation.

One way to make reparation to the Sacred Heart, and a way which will be of great advantage to ourselves, is the devotion of the nine first Fridays. Christ Himself expressly indicated this when He said to St. Margaret Mary, "I promise thee, in the excessive mercy of My heart, that My omnipotent love will grant to all who shall communicate on the first Friday of nine consecutive months, the grace of final perseverance; they will not die in My disfavor, or without receiving their sacraments, and My heart will be for them a secure refuge in that last hour." Such is the devotion our Lord asks of us, and such is the promise to which He has bound Himself. This is after the nature of a bilateral contract; if we perform the work, He obligates Himself to give the reward. What He asks of us is not difficult: the worthy reception of Holy Communion, on the first Friday of nine consecutive months; the Holy Communion to be received in the spirit of reparation to His abandoned heart. The work is within the power of all of us, and the reward will not fail; "for He Who has given the promise is faithful."⁸ "God is not a man, that He should lie: nor as the son of man, that He should be changed. Hath He said then, and will He not do? Hath He spoken, and will He not fulfill?"⁹

One might object that the work is so small, and the reward so astonishing: is it possible that "the great gift

of perseverance" can be secured at such a little price? But do not forget that an infinite mercy intervenes between the work and the reward, "the excessive mercy" of His heart, His "omnipotent love." Shall we put limits to omnipotent love — "Hath He spoken, and will He not fulfill?" Shall we not securely hope for divine generosity from the heart of Jesus? Do not let the magnitude of the reward make you incredulous, for the Apostle writes that God "is able to accomplish all things in a measure far beyond what we ask or conceive."¹⁰

A brief consideration of the Mass for the Feast of the Sacred Heart will show us both the abundance of the love of Christ and our duty of making reparation. We are ushered into the Mass with this beautiful Introit: "The thoughts of His heart to generation after generation; that

*The conditions are clear, namely: the worthy reception of Holy Communion on the first Friday of nine consecutive months. Hence, to substitute another day for Friday, or to interrupt the series, even through no fault of one's own, would make the matter doubtful. Before we can lay claim to the reward, we must be sure to have fulfilled the required conditions. Even if the interruption occurs because the first Friday falls on Good Friday, it would be more prudent to recommence the series.

It is almost superfluous to remark that the promise of our Lord cannot be abused. Should anyone say to himself, "I will make the first Fridays and thus secure for myself the grace of a happy death, and thenceforth I shall be free to live as I please; Christ will be bound to His promise" — he not only would not win the promised reward, but would even be unworthy to receive Holy Communion, for his will would be bad. "Let not such a one think that he will receive anything from the Lord" (James 1, 7).

He may deliver their souls from death, and feed them in famine.”¹¹ Such is the constant solicitude of our God and Savior, for He “wishes all men to be saved.”¹² In the words of St. Paul, the Epistle tells us of the measureless love of the Sacred Heart, and begs that we may be able “to know Christ’s love which surpasses knowledge.”¹³ The Tract insists on the mercy and mildness of Jesus: “The Lord is compassionate and merciful: long-suffering and plenteous in mercy. He will not always be angry: nor will He threaten forever. He hath not dealt with us according to our sins: nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.”¹⁴ In the Canon of the Mass we also read of Him as “*non aestimator meriti, sed veniae . . . largitor*”: not as weighing merits, but as granting forgiveness.

When God gives, He gives according to divine measure. It was according to this measure that He poured out His redeeming blood. Thus in the Communion verse we read, “One of the soldiers opened His side with a lance, and immediately there came out blood and water.”¹⁵ It might be thought that Christ had given all in the threefold bath of blood, the agony, the scourging, the crucifixion; this blood was the price He paid for our salvation and it was a “plentiful redemption.”¹⁶ But the soldier, as though eager to investigate the inexhaustible treasury, pierced His heart with a lance, and he discovered the last drops; and even these were given freely, for “immediately there came out blood” — this was the end — then, water.

The Holy Spirit was solicitous to foretell through the mouths of the prophets the suffering which the Redeemer would undergo. Thus, nearly a thousand years in advance, David prophesied in detail the crucifixion of the Redeemer.¹⁷ And more than seven hundred years in advance, Isaias foretold many features of His suffering. But in the midst of the sufferings of Christ there was still a deeper suffering: that after He had been subjected to such torment, there should be none to console Him. This anguish was also foretold, and it is used as the offertory prayer in the Mass of the Sacred Heart: "My heart hath expected reproach and misery: and I looked for one that would grieve together with Me, but there was none; and for one that would comfort Me, and I found none."¹⁸

Reconstruct that piercing scene. During His agony in the garden Christ came to His Apostles for comfort, but they were asleep. He was alone in the midst of the brutal soldiers when they scourged Him and crowned Him with thorns and mocked Him. Before the judgment-seat of Pilate the multitude cried out against Him demanding His blood. When He was carrying His cross, no one volunteered to help Him; Simon of Cyrene was forced to do so. And now He hangs on the cross. Through His aching eyes He surveys the multitude that surrounds Him. Some had come through curiosity, but many were there because they hated Him, and His torment gave comfort to their savage hearts. The passers-by jeered at Him; the chief priests and Scribes and elders mocked

Him; the robbers who were crucified with Him reproached Him. This evil company had been foretold by the prophet:

“Many bulls encompass Me:
Mighty bulls of Basham beset Me.
They open wide their mouth at Me,
Like a rending and roaring lion. . . .

For many dogs encompass Me,
A pack of evil dogs surroundeth Me:
They dig into My hands and My feet.
I can count all My bones,
While they gloat over the sight of Me.”¹⁹

This is abandonment, this is loneliness, this is desolation! What is more, it continues in great measure even to this day. “I looked for one that would grieve together with Me, but there was none; and for one that would comfort Me, and I found none.” Must you still be urged to make reparation to the Sacred Heart? — “Do thou at least, console Me, by supplying for their ingratitude as far as thou art able.” Such is the pressing request of Christ, and His heavenly Father tells us, “This is My beloved Son . . . ; hear Him.”²⁰

If, then, we appreciate Christ’s great love for us, and have compassion for Him; if we are solicitous about our salvation and desire to have His merciful heart as our secure refuge at the last, let us do what He so earnestly

desires; for "he that hearkeneth to Me shall not be confounded."²¹ Make the nine first Fridays during your whole life, not only to give Christ a constant measure of reparation, but also to secure for yourself more and more surely the reward He has promised. "Give, and it shall be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, shall they pour into your lap. For with what measure you measure, it shall be measured to you."²²

PRAYER

O GOD, *Who in the heart of Thy Son, wounded by our transgressions, dost mercifully vouchsafe to bestow upon us the infinite wealth of Thy love: we beseech Thee that, revering it with meet devotion, we may make a worthy reparation for our sins. Through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.*²³

CITATIONS

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| ¹ Phil. 2, 6-8. | ¹² 1 Tim. 2, 4. |
| ² Eph. 2, 3-7. | ¹³ Eph. 3, 19. |
| ³ 1 John 4, 9. | ¹⁴ Ps. 103 (102), 8-10. |
| ⁴ Col. 1, 20. | ¹⁵ John 19, 34. |
| ⁵ John 3, 16. | ¹⁶ Ps. 130 (129), 7. |
| ⁶ 1 Cor. 16, 22. | ¹⁷ Ps. 22 (21). |
| ⁷ John 14, 15. | ¹⁸ Ps. 69 (68), 21. |
| ⁸ Hebr. 10, 23. | ¹⁹ Ps. 22 (21), 13-14. 17-18. |
| ⁹ Num. 23, 19. | ²⁰ Matt. 17, 5. |
| ¹⁰ Eph. 3, 20. | ²¹ Ecclus. 24, 30. |
| ¹¹ Ps. 33 (32), 11. 19. Here and in the following three paragraphs the Psalms are quoted after the Missal. | ²² Luke 6, 38. |
| | ²³ Collect of the Mass of the Sacred Heart. |

VIII

MARY, OUR QUEEN AND MOTHER

*"Lady, so great thou art, such is thy might,
Whoever craves for grace and seeks not thee,
His hope, deprived of wings, attempts a flight."*

(Dante, *Paradiso*)¹

IN THE nurturing and perfecting of our spiritual life, we must not overlook the immense importance of the Blessed Virgin Mary. A little reflection on her dignity and her office will help to make this clear. Mary was chosen to be the Mother of God, the greatest dignity that could be bestowed upon any creature. She was not chosen, moreover, only when the time for the Incarnation of the Son of God had come; rather, she was chosen for this dignity from all eternity. This may be explained briefly in the following way. Certainly, the first and chief love of God, outside Himself, was His own Incarnate Son. God willed the Incarnation of His Son for His own glory, that He might receive from without, through His Incarnate Son, a praise and a love entirely worthy of Himself. Thus the God-man stands absolutely at the beginning of all the works of God. But with the Son there was, of necessity, His Mother. Thus, Son and

Mother are the one complex object of one and the same eternal divine decree; therefore, Mary's existence, in time, was decreed by God from all eternity, and that precisely because she was elected by Him to be the Mother of His Incarnate Son. Along with her Son, therefore, and because of Him, Mary too is at the beginning of all the works of God. First, God willed Christ and His Mother for His own sake; all else He willed directly and immediately for the glory of Christ and His Mother, the King and Queen of the universe, visible and invisible.

Christ and His Mother are the masterpieces of God. In Him Who was born of Mary was the fullness of the deity in the Person of God's eternal Son; He was "the image of the invisible God,"² and "the brightness of His glory,"³ and the glory of God shone on the face of Jesus Christ.⁴ Such is the King God decreed for the universe, visible and invisible. But the Mother would be worthy of the King, her Son. Mary was to be not only His Mother, but also the Bride through whom the Son of God wedded humanity to Himself. Bride and Mother! When God assumed Israel as His chosen people — His bride, according to a frequent Scriptural phrase — He found her lowly and miserable in servitude to the Egyptians. But taking Israel as His own, He lifted her up and gave her glory above all the nations by the many privileges and graces He bestowed upon her. The prophet thus expresses it in figurative language: "I saw that thou wast trodden under foot in thy own blood: and I said

to thee when thou wast in thy blood: Live: . . . and I spread my garment over thee. . . . And I swore to thee, and I entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord God: and thou becamest Mine. . . . And I clothed thee with embroidery, and shod thee with violet-colored shoes: . . . And I put a jewel upon thy forehead and earrings in thy ears, and a beautiful crown upon thy head. And thou wast adorned with gold, and silver, . . . and wast made exceeding beautiful: and wast advanced to be a queen. And thy renown went forth among the nations for thy beauty: for thou wast perfect through My beauty, which I had put upon thee, saith the Lord God.”

If God did all this for a lowly people because He had chosen them as His from among the nations, what will He not do for His own Mother? The divine Artist fashioned her beauty in eternity. He filled her to the brim with glory, and gave her a special title, “Full of Grace”; He bestowed upon her the unique privilege of an Immaculate Conception; He gave her the splendor of untarnished virginity along with the joys of motherhood; and He made her, along with her Son and dependently upon Him, the secondary head of the Mystical Body. Mary is, as it were, an eternal beauty; a beauty, a graciousness, a sanctity far below God, indeed, but immeasurably above all saints and angels; ancient, one might say, as the Ancient of Days, but fresh with all the freshness of Lourdes and Fatima; the Queen of angels, but our Queen also; Immaculate and overflowing with grace, yet the

refuge of sinners. She nursed the Infant Christ at her pure breast, but she also mothers the most outcast of sinners unto the splendors and the maturity of heroic sanctity. Through her God pours out upon us His grace and mercy. Son, behold thy Mother!⁶

It was she whom the world had expected since the divine promise of "the Woman and her Seed."⁷ From that moment onward, through all the centuries, that great hope was laid up in the bosom of humanity. One would almost suspect that the Evangelists had in mind as a secondary issue, when giving us the genealogy of Christ, this eagerness of mankind to look upon the promised "Woman." From Adam the hope passed to Seth, to Enos, to Cainan . . . ; then, down the generations and centuries, to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob; on, with a growing longing, to David, to Solomon . . . ; and as the prophecies about the coming King and His Virgin Mother grew in clarity and magnificence, the great hope surged forward in the heart of the Jewish nation, to Eleazar, to Matthan, to Jacob, to Joseph; and here at the end, with a ring of exultation — because the great hope at last has been realized — we read the triumphant words: "Joseph, the husband of Mary, and of her was born Jesus Who is called Christ."⁸ Here at last are the King and Queen, "our life, our sweetness and our hope." — "When the fullness of time came, God sent His Son, born of a woman."⁹ The promise made in paradise has been fulfilled:

“Now Thou dost dismiss Thy servant, O Lord,
according to Thy word, in peace;
Because my eyes have seen Thy salvation,
which Thou hast prepared before the face of
all peoples.”¹⁰

But in the actual order, Christ came to redeem sinful humanity through His death on a cross. He came, not to be ministered to as a King, but to minister to us as a Servant. He came to conquer His kingdom through suffering, and in this work, He wished His Mother to be intimately associated with Him. Not, indeed, that He stood in need of her co-operation to effect our redemption, for “by one offering He has perfected forever those who are sanctified”;¹¹ but He willed that His Mother should share in this glory by being our Co-redemptrix, though in a role secondary to His and dependent upon Him. Mary fulfilled this exalted task by offering the spotless Victim and uniting her own will fully with the will of her Son, Who freely laid down His life for our redemption. Jesus is as truly the Son of Mary as He is the Son of His heavenly Father; and, as the Father “has not spared even His own Son but has delivered Him for us all,”¹² so too did Mary, fully and freely, in spite of what was entailed of dreadful anguish. Thus, together with her crucified Son, she became the Redemptrix of the entire human race.

From the very first, Mary was associated with His sufferings. When she presented the Infant in the tem-

ple, the saintly old man Simeon took the Child into his arms and glorified God; and then, speaking to Mary, he added this poignant prophecy: "Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and for the rise of many in Israel, and for a sign that shall be contradicted. And thy own soul a sword shall pierce."¹³ From that moment, the sword began to torment her mother's heart. What Christ endured, she endured. The war which was waged against Him by the leaders of the Jewish people filled her with anguish too; and when the end came and her beloved Son was taken prisoner, to be scourged and crowned with thorns and placarded on a cross between two thieves, His frightful agonies tore her heart. She had full share in His pain and ignominy.

"And the reproaches of those who reproach Thee
are fallen upon me."¹⁴

Thus the "Mater Benedicta" became the "Mater Dolorosa" for our sake.

Since Mary is our Co-redemptrix, she won grace for all mankind, dependently upon her Son. What Christ merited for us, she merited too; He merited it in strict justice, she merited it because it pleased God to accept her immense merits and credit them to the advantage of all mankind. Therefore, it is seemly that she also be the one through whom all grace should be distributed to us. Her Queenship cannot be an empty title. She is Queen

in a "kingdom of truth and life; a kingdom of sanctity and grace; a kingdom of justice, love and peace,"¹⁵ and in such a kingdom the largess she dispenses to us is the gifts of grace. "Every grace that is communicated to the world has a threefold process: for it is dispensed in the right order by God unto Christ, by Christ unto the Virgin, and from the Virgin to ourselves."¹⁶ Pope Leo XIII says, "From her as from a channel filled to overflowing are derived the draughts of heavenly graces; in her hands are the treasures of the mercies of the Lord." And Pope Pius X asserts, that through her "all spiritual gifts are communicated to His [Christ's] Mystical Body." Therefore, Mary is the Mediatrix of all graces to us.

Neither is her Queenship disjoined from her Motherhood in our regard, and therefore her sovereignty is full of solicitude for her children. Mary has always shown this; she has always come close to us. She came, as the Virgin of Guadalupe, to the Mexican plateau, and stood on the Tepeyac Hill: in the midst of winter, leaving her image miraculously on the mantle of the lowly Indian Juan, and sending a cascade of fresh roses to the bishop to prove that it was she. She came to a little maiden at Lourdes, and since then a fount of graces and miracles has gushed forth from that sacred grotto. And in our own day she came to simple shepherd children at Fatima to make a pressing plea for prayer, penance and reparation, full of that urgency so characteristic of a solicitous mother. And there a mighty miracle in the heavens bore

witness to her, for the sun was seen to spin three times throwing off great shafts of colored light that fell on the sky and on the earth, while seventy thousand witnesses bowed in awe before the stupendous sign. . . . "I am the Lady of the Rosary, and I have come to warn the faithful to amend their lives and ask pardon for their sins. They must not continue to offend our Lord, already so deeply offended. And they must say the rosary."

The rosary is the armor and the weapon peculiarly Mary's own. Centuries earlier, St. Dominic spread the devotion of the rosary and overcame the Albigensian heresy. Later, Don John of Austria crushed the Turkish fleet off Lepanto while the Rosary Confraternity was making processions in Rome. At Lourdes, in modern times, the Immaculate Virgin taught Bernadette how to say the rosary; and to the children at Fatima she gave this admonition: "You must say the rosary."

But the supreme gift of Mary at Fatima was a promise patterned after that of the Sacred Heart. She made this promise to Lucy, one of the children: "My child, behold my heart surrounded with the thorns which ungrateful men place therein at every moment by their blasphemies and ingratitude. Do you, at least, try to console me, and tell them that I promise to help at the hour of death with the graces needed for salvation, whoever, on the first Saturday of five consecutive months, shall confess and receive Holy Communion, recite five decades of the rosary, and keep me company for fifteen minutes while

meditating on the fifteen mysteries of the rosary, with the intention of making reparation to me.”*

Once more Mary presses the rosary into our hands. It is not only a duty of filial devotion toward her that we accept it and by its aid strive to please her and make reparation to her afflicted heart, but it is a matter of prudence. For Mary knows the way we should follow to win grace; under her guidance we shall not fail. Our sinful and bewildered generation is blest with this new outpouring of mercy, for Christ and His Mother do not desire “the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way, and live.”¹⁷ The pledge which Mary offers us is the rosary and the assurance of a happy death, according to the great promise she made to Lucy at Fatima. This is queenly munificence; this is maternal love. Approach her, therefore, “with a true heart in fullness of faith, having our hearts cleansed from an evil conscience.”¹⁸ She will usher her clients to the throne of mercy, and there by the power of her intercession we shall find grace and life; for “God loveth them that love her.”¹⁹

*The confession may be made at any time within the eight days preceding or following the first Saturday (provided Holy Communion is received in the state of grace). The rosary may be said at any time on the first Saturday. The meditation on the mysteries may be made separately from the actual recitation or in conjunction with it.

PRAYER

O LORD Jesus Christ, our Mediator with the Father, Who hast deigned to appoint the most Blessed Virgin, Thy Mother and our Mother likewise, to be also a Mediatrix with Thee: mercifully grant that whosoever shall come to Thee to ask benefits may rejoice that through her he has received them. Who livest and reignest forever and ever. Amen.²⁰

CITATIONS

- ¹ xxxiii, 13 (Translation by A. R. Bandini, San Francisco, 1931).
- ² Col. 1, 15.
- ³ Hebr. 1, 3.
- ⁴ 2 Cor. 4, 6.
- ⁵ Ez. 16, 6-14.
- ⁶ Cf. John 19, 27.
- ⁷ Cf. Gen. 3, 15.
- ⁸ Matt. 1, 16.
- ⁹ Gal. 4, 4.
- ¹⁰ Luke 2, 29-31.
- ¹¹ Hebr. 10, 14.
- ¹² Rom. 8, 32.
- ¹³ Luke 2, 34-35.
- ¹⁴ Ps. 69 (68), 10.
- ¹⁵ Preface of the Mass of Christ the King.
- ¹⁶ St. Bernardine of Siena.
- ¹⁷ Ez. 33, 11.
- ¹⁸ Hebr. 10, 22.
- ¹⁹ Ecclus. 4, 15.
- ²⁰ Collect of the Mass of Mary, Mediatrix of All Graces.

IX

CONCLUSION

"May you walk worthily of God and please Him in all things, bearing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God."

(Col. 1, 10)

WE ARE now at the last meditation of the retreat. It was the purpose throughout to lead you on, not by threats of divine judgment, but rather by the allurements of confidence and devotion. Accordingly, it would be well to conclude with this meditation on the Sacred Heart, and to speak of three things which He desires of us. He wants us to be confident, eucharistic, apostolic.

You know the many promises which Jesus made to those who would love and console Him: promises for the individual in his own state in life, promises for families; a promise for the sinful, the tepid, the fervent; a very special promise for priests; a promise of blessing upon all our undertakings, a magnificent promise of a happy death. Truly we can say of Him that He is "rich toward all who call upon Him."¹ If, then, He has made so many and such varied promises to those who love and console Him, it is proof enough of His intense appreciation of all we shall do for Him; therefore we must have

unbounded confidence in Him. In fact, confidence should be the fairest fruit of our devotion to Him. It is also a very excellent manner of giving glory to His Sacred Heart that we should trust Him even when He seems most to have forgotten us.

It may be that you are already sincerely devoted to His Sacred Heart. You may have been doing much in your effort to offer Him love and reparation; you may have been devoted to Him in the Blessed Sacrament and have visited Him often, and then turned your eyes hopefully to His Sacred Heart looking for His promised blessings and made your claim against Him like St. Augustine: "Give us what Thou hast promised, because we have done what Thou hast commanded." "Give me the graces I need in my state in life and give them according to the measure of Your generous heart, abundantly; give me fervor, give me peace of soul, give me an increase of piety, for all these things You have promised." And yet, your trust seems to be in vain; you still are apparently what you have always been, you still are imperfect. You have not yet been led into the Holy of Holies of a deeper insight into the mystery of His magnificent heart; Jesus does not seem to have become a secure refuge to you, and you are tempted to give up.

But here is the test of your devotion, the touchstone of your friendship for Jesus, and your opportunity of doing something grand for His glory and of giving Him unbounded joy. Trust Him without question even though He apparently has forgotten you altogether. When you

can follow the wonderful example of trust given by Abraham, you will truly glorify Christ. Of Abraham we read, that "hoping against hope [he] believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was said,

'So shall thy offspring be.'

And without weakening in faith, he considered his own deadened body (for he was almost a hundred years old) and the deadened womb of Sara; and yet in view of the promise of God, he did not waver through unbelief but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, being fully aware that whatever God has promised He is able also to perform."² Such blind and unwavering trust will be the crowning glory of your devotion to the Sacred Heart.*

*The natural impossibility of having a child is pointed out by Abraham himself: "Shall a son, thinkest thou, be born to him that is a hundred years old? And shall Sara that is ninety years old bring forth? . . . And God said to Abraham: Sara thy wife shall bear thee a son; and thou shalt call his name Isaac. And I will establish My covenant with him for a perpetual covenant, and with his seed after him" (Gen. 17, 17:19). It was against this forlorn hope that Abraham hoped, trusting in the promise of God. After Isaac had grown into young manhood, God tested the trust of Abraham, saying to him, "Take thy only-begotten son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and go into the land of vision: and there thou shalt offer him for a holocaust upon one of the mountains which I will show thee" (Gen. 22, 2). Isaac

When you are discouraged, use the ejaculatory prayer, "Sacred Heart of Jesus, I trust in Thee." Use it frequently, confidently, for it will be to you like a supernatural breath of life in your trial. The Book of Ecclesiasticus says, "Their hope is on Him that saveth them, and the eyes of God are upon them that love Him."³ Jesus will be true to His promises, because, being God, "He remains faithful, for He cannot disown Himself."⁴ On one occasion when St. Margaret Mary made some petitions to the Sacred Heart, He said to her, "If thou *believest*, thou shalt see the power of My Heart in the magnificence of My love." But we must BELIEVE; we must trust blindly, unfalteringly. Again He said to her, "I am the eternal Truth Who cannot lie; I am faithful to My promises."

was the son through whom God had promised Abraham that he would become the father of a great nation. Yet God orders Abraham to slay this son in sacrifice! The patriarch, having absolute trust in the promise of God, did not hesitate a moment to fulfill the hard command. Of this test of Abraham's confidence we read, "By faith Abraham, when he was put to the test, offered Isaac; and he who had received the promises . . . was about to offer up his only-begotten son, reasoning that God has power to raise up even from the dead" (Hebr. 11, 17:19). When Abraham raised his arm to sacrifice his son on the altar, he heard this command from heaven, "Lay not thy hand upon the boy, neither do thou anything to him. Now I know that thou fearest God. . . . Because thou hast done this thing, and hast not spared thy only-begotten son for My sake, I will bless thee, and I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven" (Gen. 22, 12:16-17).

It is useful to know that the devil conquers souls very easily by discouragement. Overcome discouragement by unquestioning confidence. Let us see, by an example, how Jesus fulfilled His promise to St. Margaret Mary, as it were, by anticipation. Our Lord had told her, "Sinners shall find in My heart the source and infinite ocean of mercy"; and again, "I will be their secure refuge during life, and above all in death." Here we have the story of the good thief, a sinner who was at the very hour of death. What does he do? He comforts Christ in His agony by defending Him against the blasphemies and taunts of the wicked thief. Really, he is making reparation to the Sacred Heart. He uses only a few words; but he is courageous and unregarding of self. In the midst of that frenzied mob, he raises his voice in defense of Christ; in the torment of his own excruciating pain, he has a word of comfort for Jesus. He retorts to the impenitent thief, "Dost not even thou fear God, seeing that thou art under the same sentence? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving what our deeds deserved; but this Man has done nothing wrong." Then he turns to Jesus, looking for that ocean of mercy, that secure refuge in his last hour: "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom." And without a moment of hesitation Jesus answered, "Amen I say to thee, this day thou shalt be with Me in paradise."⁶

Next, a devotee of the Sacred Heart must become a eucharistic soul if the devotion is to be an enlightened

one. For if we truly love Him, why not go directly to Him? If we worship that burning love, why not go directly to the flaming furnace of divine charity, If we sympathize with Him over the many sacrileges and insults He suffers, chiefly in the Blessed Sacrament, why not tell that into His ear and speak with Him as one speaks with a most dear friend? A devotion to the Sacred Heart which does not bring us before the altar is not a devotion "according to knowledge." It is not according to the desires of Jesus Himself, because He clearly manifested to St. Margaret Mary that He wants reparation and love offered to Him directly and personally in the Blessed Sacrament. That is the reason why He urged on her the frequent reception of Holy Communion, and night adoration; that is the purpose of the nine first Fridays.

Finally, if you love the Sacred Heart you will labor for Him. Christ said to St. Margaret Mary, "If thou didst know how I thirst to be loved by men, thou wouldst spare nothing to gain Me their love." This is your invitation too, this is your challenge from the divine ardor of Jesus Himself: "If you love Me you will keep My commandments." Again He said to the same saint, "I desire thee to serve as an instrument to draw hearts to My love. My divine heart is so full of love for men, and for thee in particular, that being unable to contain within itself the flames of its ardent charity, it must needs spread them abroad by thy means. I have chosen thee in spite of thy unworthiness and ignorance for the accomplishment of this great design." Therefore, do not plead your

inability of doing anything by saying, "I am not a priest." Neither was St. Margaret Mary.

Not only have you this "command" of the Sacred Heart, but you have also His richest promises to persuade you, so that if you will not be led by pure generosity and friendship, you will be moved at least by the prospect of your own great gain. Here we have the words of the saint: "This divine heart promised me that He would receive lovingly all those who devote themselves to Him, that He would assure their salvation, taking care to sanctify them and render them pleasing to His eternal Father, in the measure in which they shall have labored to extend His reign of love in the hearts of others."

In working for the spread of the Gospel, St. Paul calls himself and his fellow-workers "God's helpers."⁷ In laboring for devotion to the Sacred Heart, we have a similar glory bestowed upon us, for what our Lord said to St. Margaret Mary will hold true also of us: "My daughter, help My almighty power." Help His almighty power to obtain from men that reparation and love which He so much desires. Strive generously for this end; strive with self-sacrifice. St. Margaret Mary says: "Do not fear to forget yourselves for it [the apostolate for the Sacred Heart], for this self-forgetfulness is what He asks of those whom He uses for this work. He is careful not to forget you during this time when His love looks on you with pleasure and purifies and sanctifies you that He may unite you perfectly to Himself, while you aim only at glorifying Him."

And how will you labor for Him? First, by working generously at your own sanctification, that thus you may acquire the souls of apostles; by cultivating a vivid faith in His sacramental Presence and nurturing an ardent love for it; by immolating yourself through the faithful fulfillment of all your obligations; by imitating His virtues, especially His meekness and humility. One can easily exercise the apostolate, at least in one's family circle, by suggesting and encouraging the devotion of the nine first Fridays, and the Enthronement of the Sacred Heart in the home, and — where there is the required generosity and love — night adoration in the home. These are a few suggestions. "Take in what I tell thee, for the Lord will give thee understanding in all things."⁸

Here we come to the end. It has been my hope to have you filled with heroic love for God and the Sacred Heart of Jesus; it is my hope that the fruit of this retreat will be manifested in your generous and unfailing efforts at self-sanctification. I have tried to teach you love, zeal, confidence; and so I venture to conclude with the words of the Apostle: "What you have learned and received and heard . . . , these things practise. And the God of peace will be with you."⁹

PRAYER

GRANT, *we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that ever meditating upon the truths Thou hast proposed for our intelligence, we may in every word and work of ours do that which is pleasing to Thee. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*¹⁰

CITATIONS

¹ Rom. 10, 12.

² Rom. 4, 18-21.

³ Ecclus. 34, 15.

⁴ 2 Tim. 2, 13.

⁵ Luke 23, 40-41.

⁶ Luke 23, 43.

⁷ 1 Cor. 3, 9.

⁸ 2 Tim. 2, 7.

⁹ Phil. 4, 9.

¹⁰ Collect for the Sixth Sunday
after Epiphany.



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